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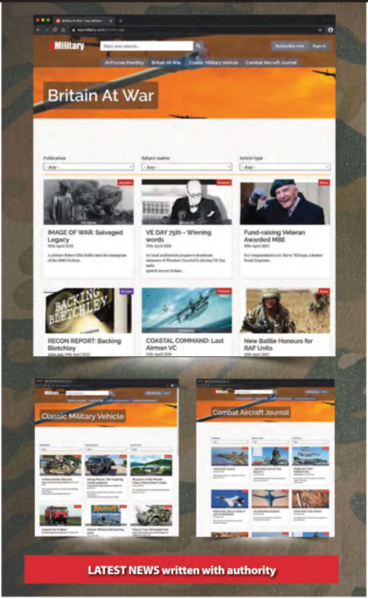
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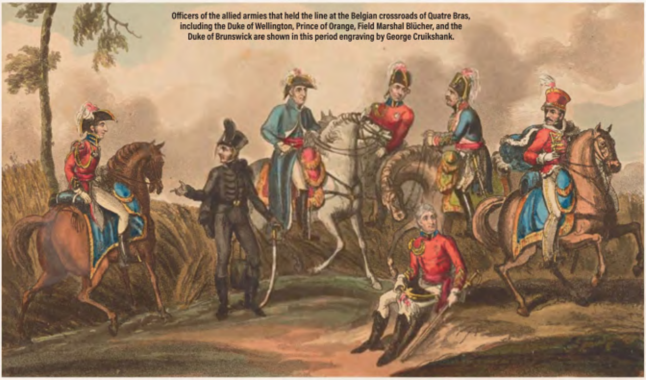

Officers of the allied armies that held the line at the Belgian crossroads of Quatre Bras, including the Duke of Wellington, Prince of Orange, Field Marshal Blücher, and the Duke of Brunswick are shown in this period engraving by George Cruikshank.

Welcome

Clashes of arms are woven into the fabric of British history, and these lesser-known actions of the redcoat era will both enlighten and fascinate.

These are the battles that made Britain. From the Redcoat Era, these battles stirred national fervour, engendered sorrow, and turmoil, preserved the nation, and empowered the people. Although their names may not resonate across the ages with the likes of Trafalgar and Waterloo, these were nevertheless key engagements in the life and growth of the United Kingdom.

Consider, for a moment, the implications of early setbacks and triumphs in North America, and the consequences of a potential invasion of the British Isles at the turn of the 19th century. Contemplate the ramifications of a continental Europe dominated by Napoleonic France, with Britain's trade lifeline crippled beyond repair. And discover the unintended consequences, both of victory and defeat on the battlefield and the high seas. Explore the great 'what ifs' of history and reflect on the course of events had the outcome of a single one of these battles been different.

The defeat of the Braddock Expedition brought emphasis to the commitment to final victory over France in North America but at the same time planted the seeds of independence in the minds of colonists who participated in the event. On the Plains of Abraham, the future of modern Canada was charted as France was compelled to later relinquish its claims to vast North American land holdings. At Long Island during the American Revolution, British victory was hollow with the escape of General George Washington and the Continental Army to fight another day. At Camden, South Carolina, a resounding British victory of the Revolution actually led to frustration and eventual strategic defeat, and the story is told in lively, insightful prose by John Ash, editor of *Britain at War* magazine.

At Camperdown, the Royal Navy defeated a Dutch fleet poised to assist in the landing of French and Irish nationalist troops in Scotland or Ireland, staving off a land campaign of uncertain outcome. At the Battle of the Nile, the sun set on Napoleon's dream of hegemony on the European continent as his fleet was destroyed by the intrepid Admiral Horatio Nelson and his band of valiant Royal Navy captains.

"The sun never sets on the British Empire." For centuries, this phrase has been uttered across the globe. As Britain fared, so fared much of the world, and British influence spread everywhere. With the depth and breadth of the empire, so too came wars of economic influence, the furtherance of Britain's territorial ambitions, and for survival itself.

Stinging defeat in southern Africa at Isandlwana during the Zulu War was a blow to British pride, and the ultimate victory over the indigenous African people brought moral and ethical questions of its own – some of which persist to this day. And so followed the two wars with the Boer settlers of southern Africa. Eventually victorious over these formidable fighters of Dutch descent, Britain remained a catalyst for the development of the modern condition in southern Africa, for better and indeed for worse.

While these battles may be obscure, existing somewhere in the shadows of British history, their impact on the nation and the world reverberate today just as surely as those that readily come to mind. These accounts are fuel for the pleasurable study of history and for thoughtful contemplation. Enjoy the retelling!

Michael Haskew

06 **The Braddock Expedition**

In 1755 during the French and Indian War, an overconfident General Edward Braddock led his expedition to Fort Duquesne and lost his life in the process, while George Washington and other future leaders of the American Revolution miraculously survived the ordeal.

12 **The Battle of the Plains of Abraham**

Also called the Battle of Quebec, the British victory on the Plains of Abraham led to the French cession of New France to Great Britain. However, General James Wolfe's triumph over French forces under the Marquis de Montcalm initiated ideas of independence among colonials in North America.

18 **The Battle of Quiberon Bay**

In the decisive naval action of the Seven Years War, the British Channel Fleet, under Admiral Sir Edward Hawke, defeated a French naval force and stifled French hopes of invading Great Britain. The victory further weighed heavily on France's loss of its colonial empire in North America.

26 **The Battle of Long Island**

British troops under General William Howe defeated George Washington's Continental Army soundly at Guan and Brooklyn Heights but failed to follow up with a decisive blow against the patriot force. The failure allowed strategic victory and an end to the American Revolution to slip through Britain's grasp.

34 **The Great Siege of Gibraltar**

During a siege that lasted for four years, British forces repelled Spanish and French attempts to take the enclave. This largest and last military action of the American Revolution eliminated the threat of a French-Spanish invasion of Britain and influenced the future of the United States, Canada, and other nations.

42 **The Battle of Camperdown**

During the War of the First Coalition, a Royal Navy fleet under the command of Admiral Adam Duncan defeated a Dutch naval squadron spoiling a potential invasion of Scotland and Ireland by French troops and Irish rebels.

50 **The Battle of Vinegar Hill**

A British victory over the rebels of the United Irishmen dealt a severe blow to the hopes of those seeking an independent Irish republic, and its influence on the course of Irish history was profound. The aftermath of the battle, as well as the entire Rebellion of 1798, was punctuated with atrocities.

58 The Battle of the Nile

Admiral Horatio Nelson and his Royal Navy squadron won a tremendous victory over the French navy at Aboukir Bay. Subsequently, British control of the Mediterranean Sea sealed the fate of Napoleon Bonaparte's military expedition to Egypt.

66 The Battle of Camden

A British army under Lord Charles Cornwallis routed a patriot force led by General Horatio Gates at Camden, South Carolina, but the poorly led patriot army survived in the field. Subsequently, a complacent Cornwallis and a rebel strategy of attrition managed to squander the fruits of victory.

74 The Battle of Vitoria

The victory of the Marquess of Wellington and his allied army over the French at Vitoria in 1813 hastened the end of the Peninsular War, elevated Wellington to greater fame, made France itself vulnerable to invasion, and contributed to the defeat of Napoleon during the War of the Sixth Coalition.

42

80

80 The Battle of Quatre Bras

On the eve of Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington's allied army fought the left wing of the French Armee du Nord. It prevented Marshal Michel Ney from coming to Napoleon's aid at Ligny and two days later, Wellington defeated Napoleon at the decisive meeting.

88 The Battle of Chinkiang

The British victory at the fortress city of Chinkiang in July 1842 was the climactic battle of the First Opium War. As a result of the British victory, the East India Company opium trade in China continued, and the nation's 'Century of Humiliation' emerged.

96 The Battle of Kambula

The British victory at Kambula on March 29, 1879 was a major turning point of the Zulu War. The defenders were significantly outnumbered but fought for five hours before the exhausted Zulu army retired. The triumph also facilitated the movement of a relief column under Lord Chelmsford toward the besieged garrison at Eshowe.

100 The Battle of Gingindlovu and the Siege of Eshowe

Overshadowed by the terrible defeat at Isandlwana earlier in the year, the British victory over thousands of Zulu warriors at Gingindlovu and the relief of the garrison at Eshowe restored British confidence in the ultimate victory.

108 The Battles of Laing's Nek and Majuba Hill

Shocking defeats at the hands of the Boers during the winter of 1881 marked the end of major hostilities in the First Boer War and dealt a major blow to British prestige. Issues remained, and the Second Boer War, with its legacy of cruelty, lay ahead.

114 Conclusions

We look back at the acts of heroism, daring and, equally importantly mistakes that influenced the outcome of these lesser-known actions. More than 150 years of conflict from the French and Indian War to the First Boer War shaped Britain's approaches and attitude to both foreign policy and military strategy.

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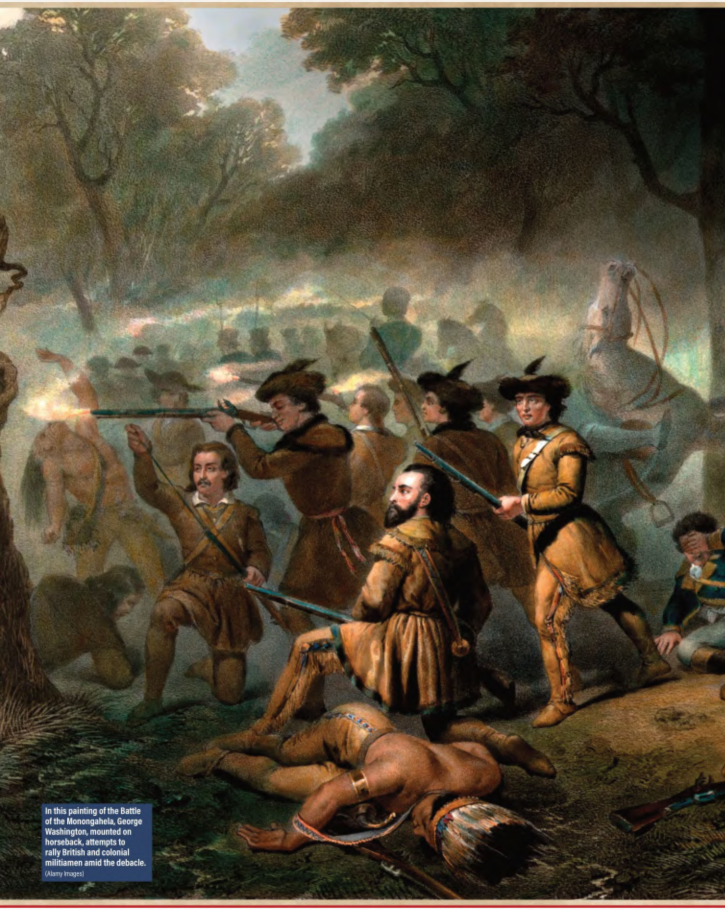
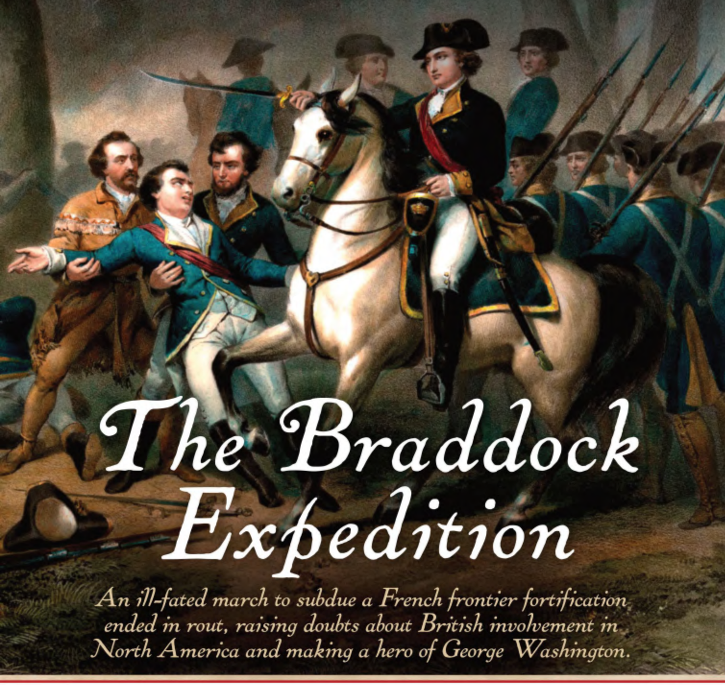


In this painting of the Battle of the Monongahela, George Washington, mounted on horseback, attempts to rally British and colonial militiamen amid the debacle. (Alamy Images)



The Braddock Expedition

An ill-fated march to subdue a French frontier fortification ended in rout, raising doubts about British involvement in North America and making a hero of George Washington.

The trek had been arduous. Weeks in the wilderness, hacking a road as they went, the British regulars and colonial militia under Major General Edward Braddock had endured the privations of military campaigning in the midst of inhospitable terrain. They were hungry. They were tired.

And yet, their morale was high. The objective of the Braddock Expedition on July 9, 1755, the French Fort Duquesne at the forks of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio rivers, the site of present-day Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was near. Braddock believed that the French had abandoned the fortification with the approach of his column.

He was wrong.

Suddenly, the shrill cry of Native American warriors and the crackle of muskets pierced the air. A pall of smoke hung just beneath the thick canopy of trees – and soldiers began to fall dead or grievously wounded. Exerting discipline as they were able, British and militia officers deployed their troops in the narrow road to return fire, but the enemy was virtually unseen.

The harrowing fight, simply known as Braddock's Defeat or the Battle of the Monongahela, was on. Soon enough, however, British cohesion was in tatters. Many officers had been shot. Soldiers bunched together in the open and began to fall back. Then, the withdrawal became a rout.

Braddock's defeat was catastrophic, still resonating nearly three centuries later among the most shocking reverses in British military history. Braddock was killed, but among the survivors was Virginia Militia Colonel George Washington along with Captain Horatio Gates, civilian teamster Daniel Morgan, militia Sergeant Daniel Boone, and Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gage, each of them destined to play a major role in the future of Britain's North American experience.

Braddock's defeat fostered both immediate and far-reaching implications, and in its wake the notion of American independence was nurtured.

A Global Rivalry

The Seven Years' War, one of numerous coalition conflicts for empire that erupted during the 18th century, may be considered the first global war. However, before the European powers of Great Britain and France were formally at war in 1756, the two nations already vied for supremacy in North America.

Historians mark the beginning of the French and Indian War, the North American theatre of the wider conflict, with the 1754 campaign of George Washington into the Ohio Country, claimed by both Britain and France. That adventure ended in the surrender of Fort Necessity to the French, but the struggle for the expansive lands beyond the Allegheny Mountains was far from over.

France sought to extend its domain in the North American interior from New France (Canada) in the north to Louisiana in the south, isolating its British rival between the rugged Alleghenies and the Atlantic coastline. At the same time, the French would be free to exploit the resources of the Ohio Country, including the lucrative fur and timber trades. To that end, they intended to construct a string of frontier forts from the Great Lakes along the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.

Robert Dinwiddie, deputy governor of Virginia, was alarmed with the French expansion in the Ohio Country and, along with other officials, appealed to London for troops to counter the growing threat. In response, Major General Braddock was named British commander-in-chief in North America, arriving at Alexandria, Virginia, in February 1755, along with the 44th and 48th Regiments of Foot.

Although Braddock had served in the British Army since 1710, he had no experience leading men in combat and had, in fact, only served outside London briefly on two occasions. He identified Fort Duquesne as the primary target for an offensive of redress against the French and set about augmenting his command, recruiting among the colonists, and organising the militia as his ranks swelled to 2,200 troops, including colonials from New York, Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas.

Road To Perdition

At the end of May, intending to utilise the road Washington had blazed a year earlier during the Fort Necessity foray, Braddock's lead element, 600 soldiers charged with clearing and widening the trail as they went, began the march from Fort Cumberland, Maryland, toward Fort Duquesne, 120 miles distant.

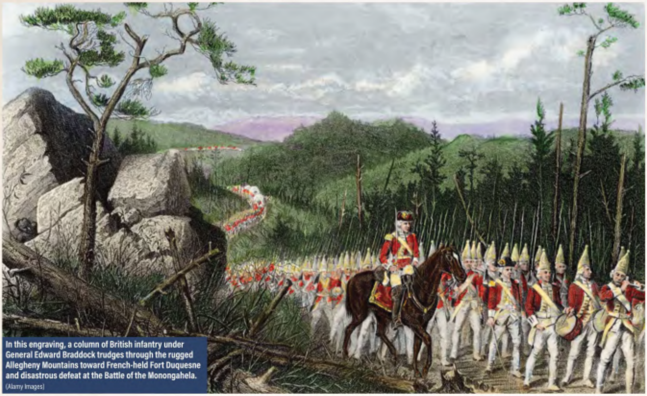
Braddock's main body, with Washington serving as the commander's volunteer aide-de-camp, stepped off on June 10. This command included scores of pack animals, a baggage and supply train, a herd of beef cattle, 19 artillery pieces, and at least 24 female camp followers and children. The pace was glacial. The advance averaged only about three miles per day and covered just 30 miles in the first week.

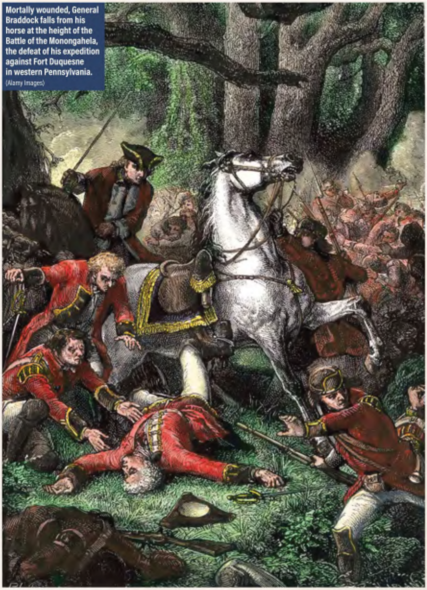
Exasperated with the progress, Braddock halted at Little Meadows near the border between Maryland and Pennsylvania, around June 17 and divided his command again. A 'flying column' of 1,400 soldiers was ordered to move on its own as rapidly as possible, while the supply train and other slower elements would trudge along as they were able. By July 3, the flying column had advanced more than 10 days ahead of the rest of the expedition.

Three days later, Braddock again halted at Deer Lick and gathered his officers for a council. Braddock, smugly confident, had always discounted the rigors of campaigning in the wilderness and underestimated the fighting ability of his French adversaries, disparaging their Native American allies as 'savages' incapable of standing up to the prowess of the British Army. The council agreed to continue the advance toward Fort Duquesne rather than wait for the remainder of the column to catch up. A harbinger of what lay ahead occurred on the morning of July 6, when the slow baggage train was attacked, the Native Americans killing a woman and a soldier and taking their scalps.

Despite the hardships and uncertainty, the head of Braddock's command reached the banks of the Monongahela on July 8, its combat efficiency appreciably eroded but just 10 miles from Fort Duquesne.

Meanwhile, Claude-Pierre Pecaudy de Contrecoeur, the French commander at Fort Duquesne, had been warned of Braddock's approach. Rather than abandon the fort, he ordered Captain Daniel Liénard de Beaujeu to gather a force of 637 allied Native Americas – Huron, Delaware, Shawnee, Miami, and Ottawa – along with 108 Troupes de la Marine,


In this engraving, a column of British infantry under General Edward Braddock trudges through the rugged Allegheny Mountains toward French-held Fort Duquesne and disastrous defeat at the Battle of the Monongahela. (Alamy Images)



Mortally wounded, General Braddock falls from his horse at the height of the Battle of the Monongahela, the defeat of his expedition against Fort Duquesne in western Pennsylvania. (Alamy Images)

naval soldiers trained to fight on land or at sea, and 150 French-Canadian militiamen to ambush the British as they crossed the Monongahela.

Shouts, Shots, and Shadows

Braddock's route of march actually required two time-consuming crossings of the Monongahela; therefore, before dawn on the morning of July 9, 1755, he sent Lieutenant Colonel Gage ahead with three companies of foot and a pair of 6-pounder cannon. Gage's soldiers climbed the 12-foot embankment at the first crossing, and by the time Braddock reached it, Gage had moved on to secure the second. Around noon, the two forces reunited and affected the second crossing of the Monongahela. Washington, suffering from a bout of dysentery, had been left behind at Bear Camp, but caught up with Braddock during the day.

Expecting little or no organised opposition and that the French might have already evacuated, Braddock was aware that his column had marched under the watchful eyes of enemy scouts but did not order skirmishers deployed. He allowed colours to be uncased, and the band struck up the jaunty *Grenadier March* for the final advance on Fort Duquesne.

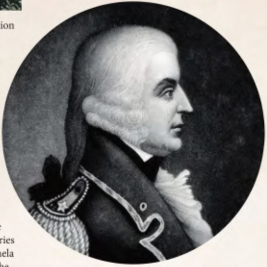
Apprised of the British movement, Beaujeu realised that his ad hoc body could not execute the anticipated ambush. Rather than falling back, though, he deployed his force in an arc, covering the route of march to the front and spilling along both flanks of the crude road. Instead of an ambush, as some histories have reported, the Battle of the Monongahela was actually a meeting engagement with the opposing forces finding one another in the thick of the forest.

In mid-afternoon, the Native American war whoop sent shivers down British spines. The concentrated fire of Beaujeu's men erupted from behind rocks and trees, the attackers obscured amid the thick forest as they executed a classic double envelopment. Astonished, the British regained their composure and sluggishly continued to advance up the road, halting in ranks to deliver volleys at intervals.

Although Braddock has been criticised for failing to grasp the nuances of wilderness warfare as employed by the French and Native Americans, recent historical evaluation has concluded that the British formations had generally been somewhat effective in earlier engagements and British troops had even trained to an extent for such warfare in Europe. Still, the failure to deploy skirmishers put Braddock at a distinct disadvantage.

The British soldiers, who had abandoned their uniform coats prior to the expedition and marched in their waistcoats, delivered punishing fire in response to the enemy onslaught. Their third volley killed Beaujeu, and some of the French and Canadian soldiers retreated. The Native Americans, however, were undeterred. British officers, many of them on horseback, were conspicuous targets, and a number of them were killed or wounded early in the battle.

Some colonial militiamen, familiar with wilderness fighting techniques, took shelter among the trees and uneven ground, firing back at the enemy. However, Gage was unable to deploy his two cannon in the confines of the road and could not wrest the initiative from the attackers as his regulars remained exposed. His beleaguered contingent began to retire as the remainder of Braddock's column was still advancing up the road, and the two British formations became hopelessly entangled.



After discounting the dangers of frontier warfare, General Braddock lost his life during his ill-fated expedition against Fort Duquesne. (Alamy Images)

FRANKLIN'S FATEFUL FORECAST

Prior to the departure of his ill-fated expedition, General Edward Braddock sought the financial and logistical support of Benjamin Franklin, deputy postmaster general in Britain's North American colonies. Franklin, an inventor and philosopher extraordinaire, was destined to become one of the Founding Fathers of the United States.

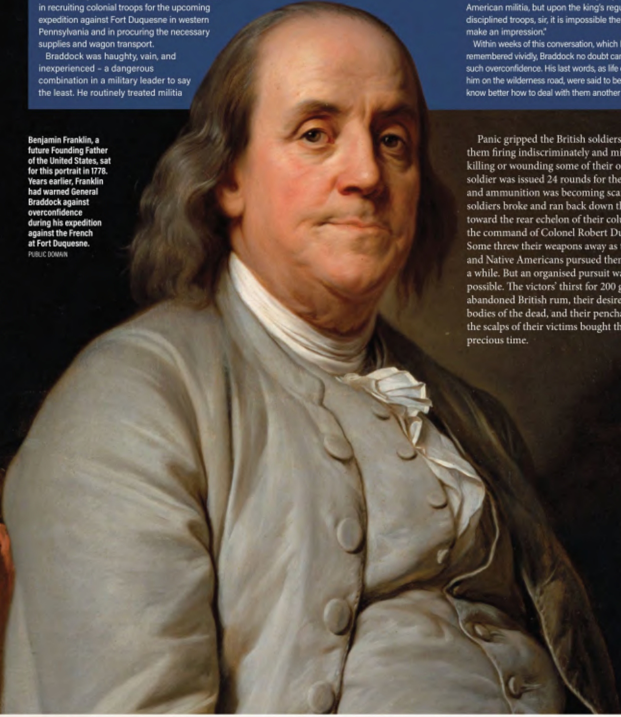
However, in the spring of 1775, he was a loyal British subject prevailed upon to provide a service to the military. Braddock asked Franklin to assist in recruiting colonial troops for the upcoming expedition against Fort Duquesne in western Pennsylvania and in procuring the necessary supplies and wagon transport.

Braddock was haughty, vain, and inexperienced – a dangerous combination in a military leader to say the least. He routinely treated militia commanders and fellow officers of the British Army with disdain, while he scoffed at the difficulties of waging an offensive campaign in the wilds of Allegheny Mountains and the Ohio Country. Further, he brushed off concerns that the French and Native American forces he might meet on the road to Fort Duquesne posed any real threat to well-trained and disciplined British regulars.

Franklin knew better and warned the officer: "The only danger I apprehend of obstruction to your march is from ambuscades of Indians, who, by constant practice, are dexterous in laying and executing them, and the slender line, near four miles long, which your army must make, may expose it to be attacked by surprise in its flanks, and to be cut like a thread into several pieces."

True to form, Braddock responded: "Savages may indeed be a formidable enemy to your raw American militia, but upon the king's regular and disciplined troops, sir, it is impossible they should make an impression."

Within weeks of this conversation, which Franklin remembered vividly, Braddock no doubt came to rue such overconfidence. His last words, as life ebbed from him on the wilderness road, were said to be: "We shall know better how to deal with them another time."



Benjamin Franklin, a future Founding Father of the United States, sat for this portrait in 1778. Years earlier, Franklin had warned General Braddock against overconfidence during his expedition against the French at Fort Duquesne.
PUBLIC DOMAIN

Panic gripped the British soldiers, many of them firing indiscriminately and mistakenly killing or wounding some of their own. Each soldier was issued 24 rounds for their musket, and ammunition was becoming scarce. British soldiers broke and ran back down the road toward the rear echelon of their column under the command of Colonel Robert Dunbar. Some threw their weapons away as the French and Native Americans pursued them for a while. But an organised pursuit was not possible. The victors' thirst for 200 gallons of abandoned British rum, their desire to loot the bodies of the dead, and their penchant to take the scalps of their victims bought the British precious time.

Braddock had ridden toward the sound of the fighting, and his horse was shot from beneath him. As the British commander mounted a second, a ball struck him in the chest, piercing a lung, and he fell gravely wounded. Officers rushed to his aid, Washington among them, and carried Braddock toward the relative safety of the rear area.

In the midst of the three-hour debacle, George Washington came into his own as a leader of men. Despite his ill health, Washington was seen in the midst of the fighting, urging soldiers and militiamen to regain their composure and fight on. As the situation dissolved into chaos, he asserted command authority that he did not officially possess, found a small area of high ground, and patched together a rear guard whose stand allowed others to escape the death trap. After the battle, Washington wrote that his coat had been shredded by 12 musket balls, but he miraculously emerged unscathed.

Reeling from the encounter, the British staggered back the way they came, but the remnants of the shattered flying column did not stumble into Dunbar's camp until two days later. During the retreat, cannon were rendered useless and wagons were emptied of supplies to accommodate the dozens of wounded that could not walk.

On June 13, the British stopped to rest near Great Meadows, the former site of Fort Necessity, and Braddock died during the night. Washington officiated during the impromptu funeral service the following day. Braddock was buried in the centre of the road, and wagons rolled across the grave in the hopes of obscuring it from an enemy that might otherwise exhume and mutilate the general's body.

In the Battle of the Monongahela, Braddock's once formidable force had been crushed, suffering 456 killed and 422 wounded in the ignominious defeat, a stunning casualty rate of 48%. Twenty-six of the dead and 37 wounded were officers. In sharp contrast, the French and Native Americans lost 30 killed and 57 wounded.

With Colonel Dunbar in command, the bloodied remnants of the Braddock Expedition finally reached Fort Cumberland. Dunbar refused the request of the Virginia and Pennsylvania governments to build a fort at Rayston to protect against anticipated French and Native American incursions. In August, he marched his command to Philadelphia, leaving British settlements on the frontier to fend for themselves against attack.

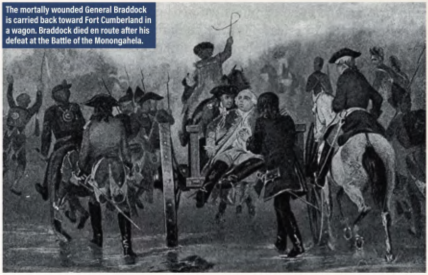
From Ashes Ascendant

The decisive defeat of the Braddock Expedition spawned consequences far beyond the bodies of British soldiers left on the battlefield. The French and Native Americans terrorised British settlers along the frontier, and many fled east to escape the escalating hostilities.

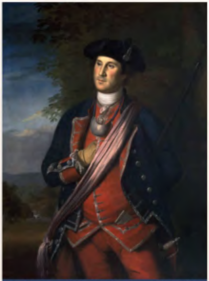
George Washington seemed to lead a charmed life during the horrific fight, and his immeasurable courage made him something of a celebrity. He received the nickname, 'Hero of the Monongahela' and his fame began to spread. Two decades later, Washington led the Continental Army during the American Revolution, and he became the first president of the United States. A single ball fired from a French musket at the Monongahela might have changed all that.

The same is true for other notables as well.

Captain Horatio Gates also rose to general rank in the Continental Army and commanded the forces that defeated the British Army under General John Burgoyne at Saratoga in 1777. Although the victory may be more appropriately attributed to Gates' able subordinates, it was nevertheless a turning point in the Revolution. In 1780, Gates commanded colonial troops during the disastrous defeat at the hands of Lord Cornwallis at Camden, South Carolina.



The mortally wounded General Braddock is carried back toward Fort Cumberland in a wagon. Braddock died en route after his defeat at the Battle of the Monongahela.



Young George Washington, in the uniform of the Virginia Militia, became a hero at the Battle of the Monongahela during the French and Indian War in 1755.

Daniel Morgan, also a general of the Continental Army, masterminded the finest set-piece battle of the Revolution at Cowpens in South Carolina in 1781. Morgan's resounding victory over the British under Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton contributed to the turning of the tide of the war in the southern colonies.

Daniel Boone survived the catastrophe at the Monongahela to become the stuff of legend. His exploits as a frontiersman have been remembered for generations.

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gage rose to the rank of general in the British Army and served many years in North America. The Revolution broke out during his tenure as commander-in-chief of British forces in the colonies. He also served as military governor of the Massachusetts Bay colony, and his orders to seize rebel stores of arms and ammunition at Lexington and Concord in 1775 sparked the outbreak of the armed conflict.

Without doubt, their experiences with the Braddock Expedition taught each of these men valuable lessons regarding frontier warfare.

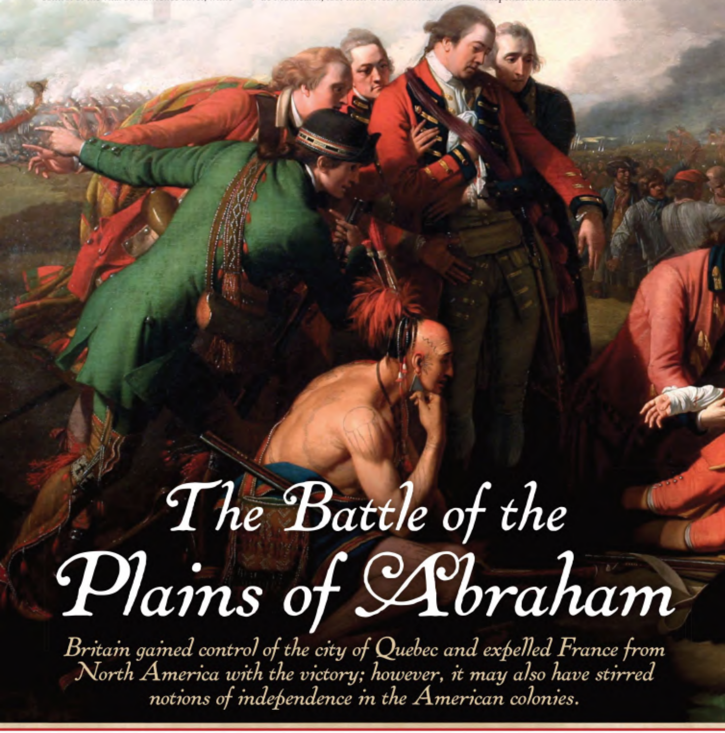
Further, the expedition did prove that an army could traverse the rugged Alleghenies and operate beyond the natural barrier. However, Braddock's failure shook the British establishment in North America. Many had previously believed that the British Army was invincible, quite capable of providing the colonists with the protection needed to expand into the Ohio Country. Such doubts and disillusion among the people in North America may well have contributed to a burgeoning sense of independence and self-sufficiency, ultimately cultivating the seeds of revolution.

Some historians say that the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, also known as the Battle of Quebec, was over in a few hours. Others aver that the issue was decided in 15 minutes.

Regardless, the outcome of the clash of arms on September 13, 1759 was decisive. After suffering a string of defeats during the early months of the French and Indian War, an extension of the Seven Years War in Europe, British troops defeated the French and asserted control of the vital St. Lawrence River, while the city of Quebec fell into British hands like a ripe plum within a few days. The victory led to French withdrawal from North America, opening the door to British hegemony.

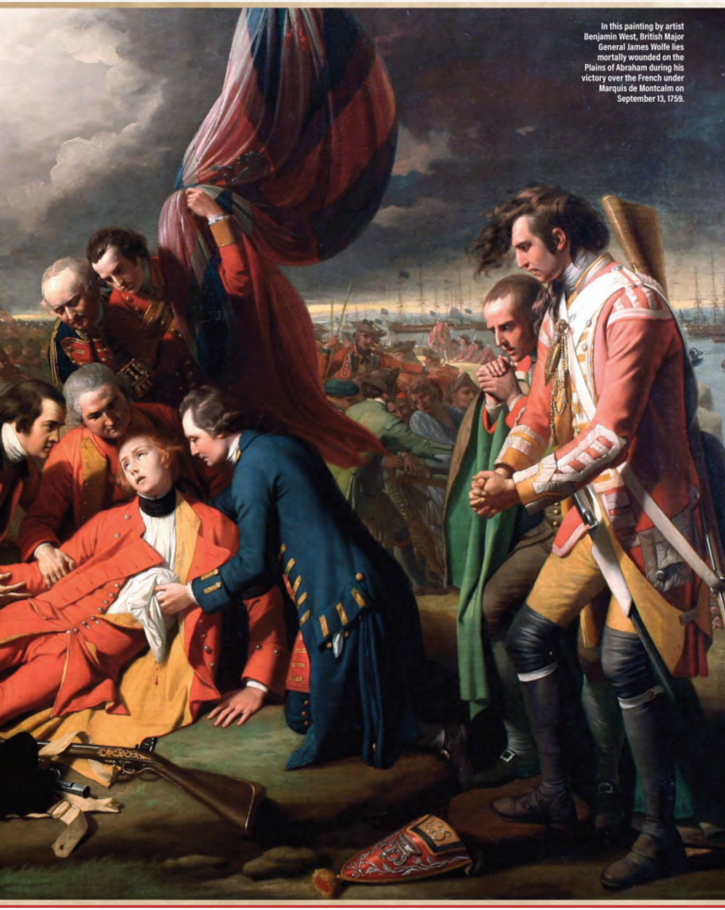
The execution of a daring amphibious landing and ascent of a daunting cliffside placed British troops in position to compel the French to sally from the fortress of Quebec and fight in the open. In the event, both commanders, Major General James Wolfe and Louis-Joseph, Marquis de Montcalm, lost their lives. Montcalm further lost the battle as his infantry charged headlong toward the disciplined ranks of British soldiers only to be decimated by two withering volleys of musket fire.

While the immediate impact of the British victory on the Plains of Abraham is apparent, its long-term ramifications became entwined in a supreme irony. The very British colonial subjects who had participated in the victory before the walls of Quebec City began to consider their own future, perhaps one independent of the rule of the Crown.

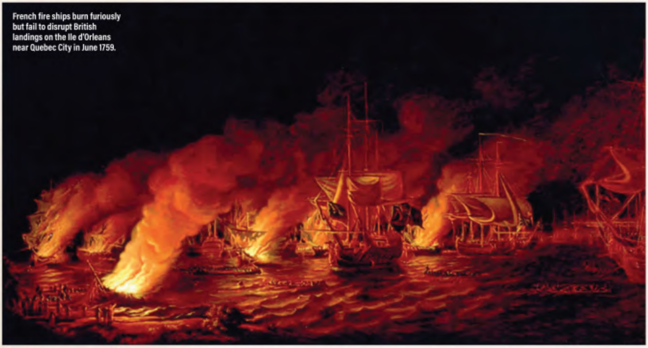


The Battle of the Plains of Abraham

Britain gained control of the city of Quebec and expelled France from North America with the victory; however, it may also have stirred notions of independence in the American colonies.



In this painting by artist Benjamin West, British Major General James Wolfe lies mortally wounded on the Plains of Abraham during his victory over the French under Marquis de Montcalm on September 13, 1759.



French fire ships burn furiously but fail to disrupt British landings on the Ile d'Orleans near Quebec City in June 1759.

Prelude to the Plains of Abraham

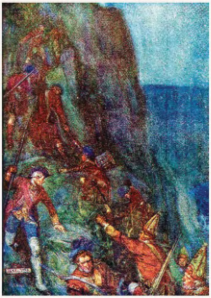
The situation in the North American theatre of the Seven Years War had gone badly for the British. That is, until the resolve and political sway of statesman and future prime minister William Pitt, the Elder, brought unwavering commitment to the defeat of France, a traditional rival of Great Britain for pre-eminence on the world stage.

Following a series of setbacks, Pitt dedicated the resources necessary to win a protracted war against the French in North America, and the reversal of fortune began in earnest with the capture of the fortress city of Louisbourg, situated on Cape Breton Island, in the summer of 1758 following a naval battle and 48-day siege. Further offensive operations brought all of Atlantic Canada under British control, facilitating an expedition against another fortress city, Quebec, the seat of French power and authority in North America, via the St. Lawrence River.

In the months preceding the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, the French military presence in North America had experienced several other unsettling developments. Although military victories had been won, inhospitable winter weather, failing crop yields, and the settlement of grievances between some formerly allied Native American tribes and the British had begun to erode French strength. Further, the Royal Navy blockade of France's European ports prevented reinforcements and the free flow of supplies to New France, as the nation's vast territorial claims in North America were known.

With Pitt's indispensable support, therefore, the time had come for a decisive British offensive. General James Wolfe, who had been present at Louisbourg and lauded for his performance during the victory, was appointed commander of the expeditionary force that would eventually capture Quebec, while a Royal Navy squadron of 49 ships and 140 smaller vessels, under Vice Admiral Charles Saunders, was to provide support. At 32 years of age, Wolfe was young, and at times his relationships with subordinate brigadiers would be sorely tested during the run-up to the Battle of the Plains of Abraham.

Although Wolfe had expected an assembled force of more than 12,000 troops, his strength peaked at only 8,000, including American colonial militia and rangers. Defending Quebec was an army of roughly 18,000 men under the command of Montcalm, who had successfully repulsed a British thrust against Fort Carillon on the shore of Lake Champlain in the summer of 1758. Montcalm's command included 11,000 inexperienced Canadian militia, 2,400 regular army troops, and roughly 3,200 Troupes de la Marine and French naval personnel fighting as infantry. Additionally, about 1,800 Native Americans were present with the French at Quebec.



British soldiers climb the heights of L'Anse-du-Foulon on September 13, 1759, prior to taking up positions on the Plains of Abraham.

In preparation for movement along the St. Lawrence, James Cook, a young naval officer who later gained fame but was killed by natives in the Hawaiian Islands during explorations of the Pacific, provided valuable service in surveying the river with its hazardous currents and shoals, allowing Wolfe to proceed by water toward his objective. Wolfe arrived at Ile d'Orleans, about three miles east of Quebec City, on June 27, 1759, avoiding seven French fire ships that had been sent downriver to disrupt the British landings.

Within two weeks, British troops had occupied Point Lévis on the southern shore of the St. Lawrence immediately across the river from Quebec. Wolfe was also aware of a French encampment at Beauport adjacent to the Montmorency River eight miles northeast of the city and landed troops nearby in preparation for a potential assault against these positions that were well supported by French fortifications and artillery.

The initial approach of the British startled Montcalm, whose primary defences had been arrayed to resist an attack from the south or west. The French commander responded by hastening the completion of a network of redoubts on the northern shore of the St. Lawrence from the St. Charles River to Montmorency Falls. About 12,000 troops were placed in strongpoints and batteries along its length. With these troop dispositions, Montcalm felt well prepared to fend off an attack.

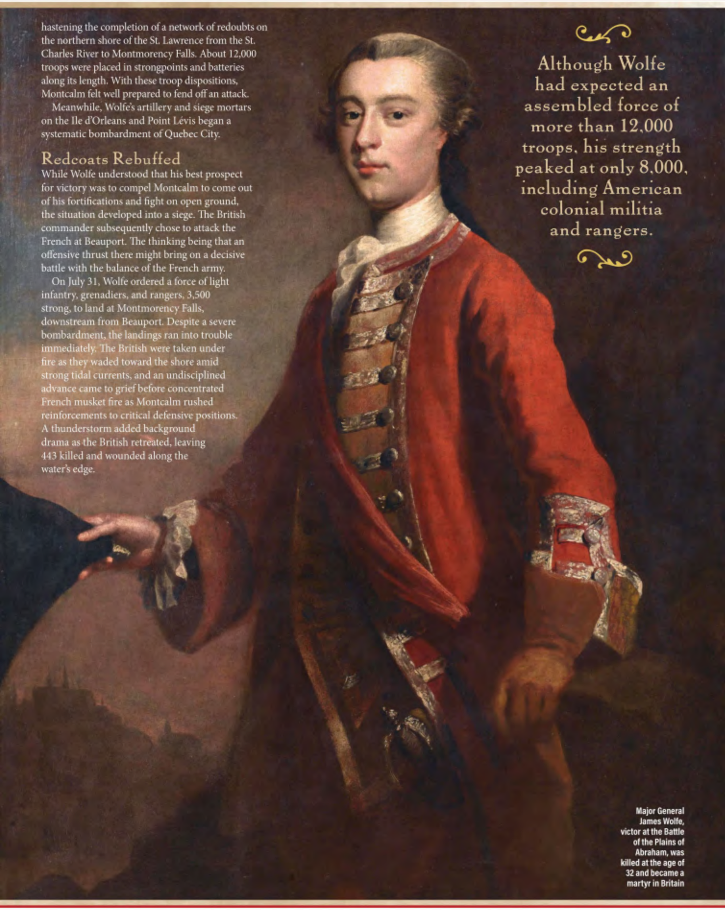
Meanwhile, Wolfe's artillery and siege mortars on the Ile d'Orleans and Point Lévis began a systematic bombardment of Quebec City.

Redcoats Rebuffed

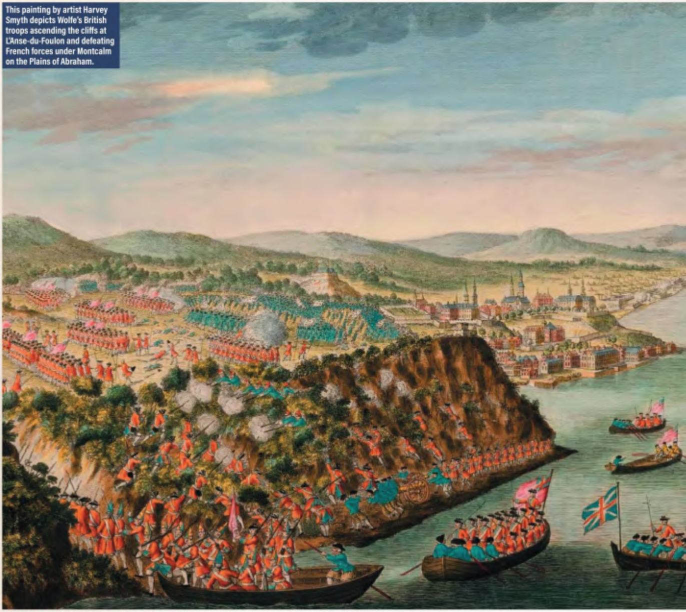
While Wolfe understood that his best prospect for victory was to compel Montcalm to come out of his fortifications and fight on open ground, the situation developed into a siege. The British commander subsequently chose to attack the French at Beauport. The thinking being that an offensive thrust there might bring on a decisive battle with the balance of the French army.

On July 31, Wolfe ordered a force of light infantry, grenadiers, and rangers, 3,500 strong, to land at Montmorency Falls, downstream from Beauport. Despite a severe bombardment, the landings ran into trouble immediately. The British were taken under fire as they waded toward the shore amid strong tidal currents, and an undisciplined advance came to grief before concentrated French musket fire as Montcalm rushed reinforcements to critical defensive positions. A thunderstorm added background drama as the British retreated, leaving 443 killed and wounded along the water's edge.

Although Wolfe had expected an assembled force of more than 12,000 troops, his strength peaked at only 8,000, including American colonial militia and rangers.



Major General James Wolfe, victor at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, was killed at the age of 32 and became a martyr in Britain



This painting by artist Harvey Smyth depicts Wolfe's British troops ascending the cliffs at L'Anse-du-Foulon and defeating French forces under Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham.

Wolfe at the Door

Following the stunning defeat of July, Wolfe shifted his focus upstream from Quebec City. In failing health and suffering from a pronounced lack of self-confidence, the British commander endured the pain of kidney stones and a persistent fever but persevered.

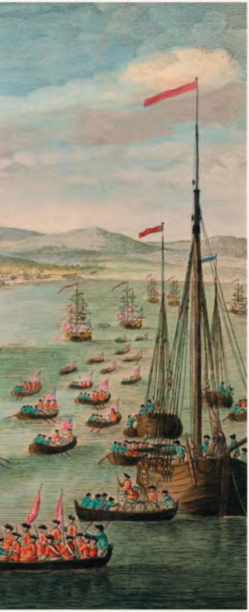
In August, Saunders' ships successfully ran the gauntlet of Quebec's artillery batteries and began searching for a suitable location to land troops. A significant presence upstream from the fortress would threaten to sever Montcalm's lines of supply and communication with Montreal and might force the French to fight in the field. Meanwhile, Wolfe also ordered Brigadier James Murray to lay waste to French settlements upriver from Quebec, destroying supply stores and interdicting shipping as he went. Despite the additional pressure on the garrison of the fortress city, Montcalm resisted the temptation to give battle in the open.

Climax on the Plains

By mid-September, Wolfe had chosen an advantageous location for a renewed attack, one which Montcalm had perhaps discounted as an unlikely avenue of approach. Wolfe proposed to land 4,500 soldiers at L'Anse-du-Foulon, roughly two miles upstream from Quebec City. However, a cliff adjacent to the site rose 170 feet from the riverbank, presenting an imposing obstacle to the operation's progress.

Nevertheless, at 4am on September 13, 1759, the British advanced stealthily, a small force under Lieutenant Colonel William Howe subduing the few French sentinels posted along the clifftop west of Quebec's fortress walls. At sunrise, Wolfe and a division of British regulars had climbed to the open plateau above the St. Lawrence, and by 8am the entire command had deployed two ranks deep in a shallow arc just over a half-mile long. The area had long been known as the Plains of Abraham, named for farmer and fisherman Abraham Martin, owner of the ground a century earlier.

When word of the British landing reached Montcalm, he responded in the hopes of defeating the enemy before Wolfe could consolidate his positions. At long last, the fight on open ground that Wolfe had sought was developing. Montcalm sent 1,500 militia and Native American warriors along with 1,900 French regulars to confront the threat. Although historians debate the swiftness



of his move, Montcalm nevertheless felt a sense of urgency and chose not to wait for reinforcements from the 4,500 troops at Beauport.

Montcalm's haste may well have contributed to his downfall. Wolfe's professional soldiers were well trained in set piece infantry combat, while the French troops and militia had little or no experience with such actions. Although French marksmen had taken positions along the British flanks and inflicted casualties, Montcalm's primary advance was rushed and haphazard. Militiamen and soldiers alike began firing at the British lines at the outer limit of their muskets' range. Some accounts of the engagement relate that Wolfe ordered his ranks to lie prone to avoid the French small arms fire.

Patiently, the British soldiers waited as the onrushing French came to within 130 feet of their line. Rising in unison, they loosed a devastating volley into the faces of the enemy. A second volley shattered the advancing line, and the French reeled backward. In a flash, British troops took up the chase, and one soldier of the 78th Highlanders recalled that they "…pursued them to the very Sally Port of the town."

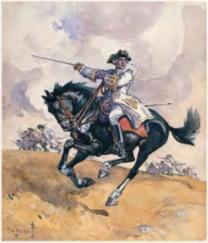
Just after the initial order to fire, Wolfe was wounded in the hand. Seconds later he was struck in the groin and chest. While lying on the ground he was informed that the French were running and replied, "Now, God be praised, I will die in peace." He died moments later and became a revered martyr in Britain. Montcalm, on horseback, was caught up in the rout and struck by the explosion of an artillery shell. Mortally wounded in the stomach and thigh, he was carried inside the city walls and died within hours.

Brigadier George Townshend took command of the British force and entrenched on the field, dissuading a French column from Beauport from attacking. French casualties on the fateful day included nearly 1,100 killed, wounded, or captured, while the British lost nearly 1,300 dead and wounded.

Five days after the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, on September 18, 1759, the French surrendered the fortress city of Quebec to the British.

Quebec Raises Questions

In the aftermath of the great victory at Quebec, the British position along the St. Lawrence remained somewhat precarious. The French returned in April 1760 and defeated the British at the Battle of Sainte-Foy, west of the city. Although they followed the victory with a brief siege of Quebec, the spring thaw allowed elements of the Royal Navy to return to the St. Lawrence, and the French retired to Montreal.



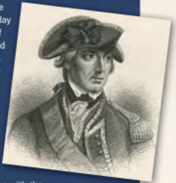
The Marquis de Montcalm led his troops against the British on the Plains of Abraham and was mortally wounded by an artillery shell.

The victory at Quebec was the key to British supremacy in North America. In September 1760, Montreal fell, and with the 1763 Treaty of Paris, all of New France was ceded to Great Britain. The British people proclaimed 1759 as "Annus Mirabilis," or the year of miracles due to the succession of startling military victories won against rival France.

However, an unintended consequence emerged from the celebrated victory on the Plains of Abraham. Although Native American raids were a continual concern, colonial settlers in North America found themselves no longer in need of a large British military presence to protect them from the French. Further, the Crown's issuance of the Proclamation of 1763 restricted settlement of the country beyond the Appalachian Mountains, fostering resentment among colonials who believed it deprived them of their rightful opportunity for growth and prosperity.

Ultimately, the victory at the Plains of Abraham emboldened the colonial leaders in North America, providing impetus to the coming of the American Revolution, which erupted less than a decade later.

HOWE AND THE REVOLUTION



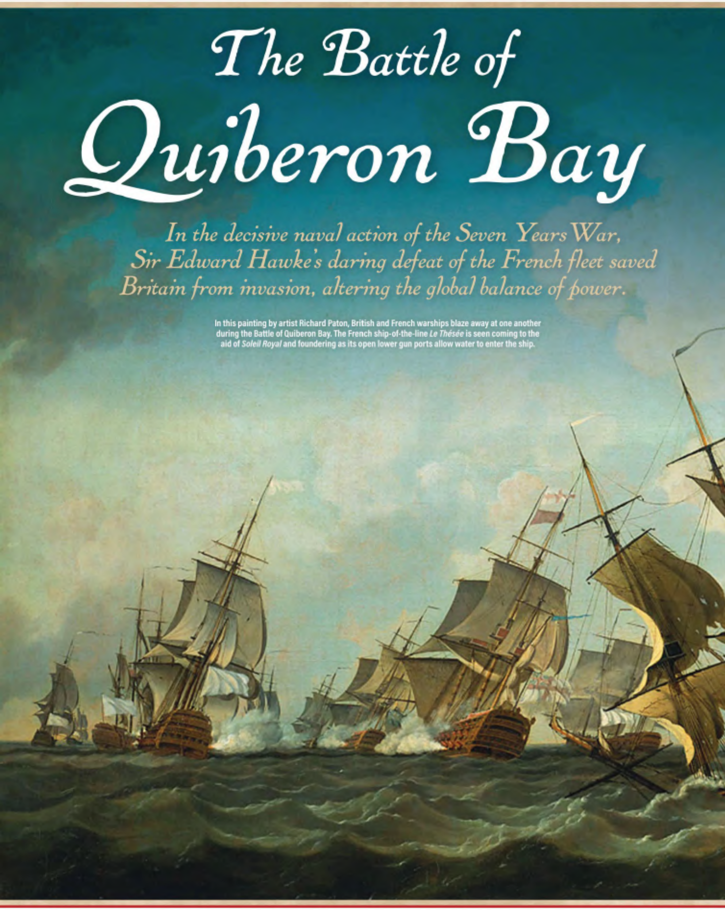
Brilliant Brigadier William Howe (right), who heroically led the advance party that secured the cliffside on the Plains of Abraham, went on to play a prominent role in the American Revolution. Howe led the left wing of the British Army in the costly victory at Bunker Hill and later succeeded General Thomas Gage in command of British troops in North America.

Howe was a superb tactician and inflicted severe defeats on George Washington and the Continental Army at Long Island, Brandywine, and Germantown, occupying Philadelphia in 1777. However, flawed strategic planning contributed to the defeat and surrender of General John Burgoyne at Saratoga when the latter was left with virtually no support because of Howe's concurrent campaign into Pennsylvania. Compounding his strategic misstep, Howe failed to finish off Washington's beleaguered army, which suffered through a severe winter at Valley Forge but lived to fight another day.

Criticism in the British press and factions of the government, along with the overwhelming belief that an opportunity to crush the rebellion had been frittered away, prompted Howe to resign his command in the spring of 1778.

The Battle of Quiberon Bay

In the decisive naval action of the Seven Years War, Sir Edward Hawke's daring defeat of the French fleet saved Britain from invasion, altering the global balance of power.



In this painting by artist Richard Paton, British and French warships blaze away at one another during the Battle of Quiberon Bay. The French ship-of-the-line *Le Thésée* is seen coming to the aid of *Soleil Royal* and foundering as its open lower gun ports allow water to enter the ship.

The weather was atrocious. Rough winds roiled the sea, and rain squalls drenched the decks of the Royal Navy Channel Fleet, but Admiral Sir Edward Hawke was undeterred.

The order was given, and the signal flags snapped in the gale: 'General Chase'. Hawke's quarry, the battle fleet of French warships under the command of Hubert de Brienne, Comte de Conflans, had departed Brest and was nearing its rendezvous at Quiberon Bay with an invasion force that was intended to land in Britain to put paid a series of recent reversals and bring long-sought victory to France in the Seven Years War.

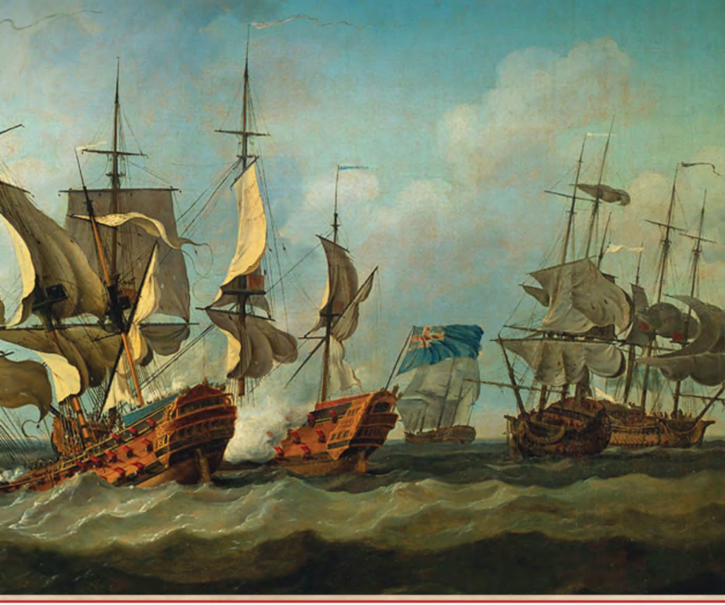
When Conflans spotted the Royal Navy squadron, rather than bringing on a general engagement from a disadvantageous position, he made for the safety of the bay, where the reefs and shoals would protect his ships – or so he thought. The French were familiar with the rocks and shallows of Quiberon Bay, and surely the British would not be so foolhardy as to follow them into the treacherous labyrinth. Hawke, however, cast aside any doubts and pressed forward. When the pilot of his flagship, the 100-gun ship-of-the-line *Royal George*, warned of the hazards ahead, Hawke eyed the French flagship and curtly replied, "You have done your duty in pointing out the risk. Now lay me alongside the *Soleil Royal*!"

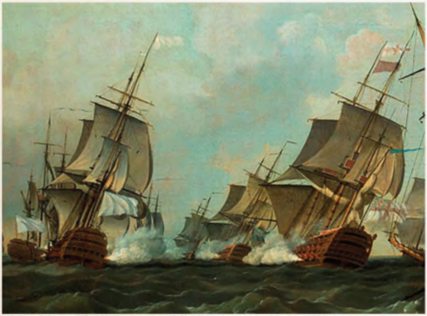
Hawke defied convention during the Battle of Quiberon Bay on November 20, 1759, declining to form his ships in line of battle, and won the decisive naval engagement of the Seven Years War. In doing so, he thwarted the threat of a French invasion of Great Britain and ushered in an era of Royal Navy pre-eminence on the high seas. His gamble paid off with the tactical advantage of experienced sailors, intrepid lieutenants, and the daring for which admirals of the Royal Navy who followed his example came to be known. Defeat meant disaster, but for Hawke there was no alternative to attacking the enemy.

Although Lord Nelson's triumph at Trafalgar a half-century later remains the most celebrated Royal Navy victory of the age of sail, the intrepid Hawke won not only the day at Quiberon Bay but also the future for the British nation.

Britain's Troubled Waters

For France, the year 1759 had been one of significant reversal, but Foreign Minister Etienne Francois, Marquis de Stainville, Duc de Choiseul nevertheless intended to strike a war-winning blow against the traditional British enemy. And nothing would accomplish the task more profoundly than a successful invasion of Great Britain itself. To that end, the Marquis devised an offensive that would, if successful, bring the British to heel.





***Soleil Royal*, the French flagship at Quiberon Bay (left) and *Royal George*, flagship of the British Channel Fleet, fire broadsides at one another at the height of the Battle of Quiberon Bay, November 20, 1759.**

A French army, 18,000 strong, was gathered ashore at the mouth of the River Loire in Brittany. They were there to embark a flotilla of more than 100 barges and flat-bottomed boats, along with a small fleet of warships stripped of their guns to provide additional space, assembled at Quiberon Bay, near the port of St. Nazaire on the Bay of Biscay. The fleet was to transport the land force to British shores. As the master plan developed, Admiral Conflans would sail from Brest to escort the landing ships to a chosen locale. At the same time, another naval squadron would sail from the Mediterranean to add further support to the 21 ships-of-the-line and six frigates under Conflans. Once the French army had crossed the narrow waters of the English Channel, the British would be defeated in the decisive land battle.

Conflans was 69 years old. He had been made a Marshal of France by King Louis XV a year earlier and held the confidence of the monarch, as well as his contemporaries. However, he accepted command of "le Grand Dessein de débarquement" reluctantly, even voicing his objections to the offensive to the king himself.

Hawke, on the other hand, was a veteran of naval warfare, having participated in the Battle of Toulon in 1744 and capturing six French ships during the Second Battle of Cape Finisterre in the autumn of 1747 during the War of the Austrian Succession. At age 54 he was a member of the House of Commons. He was a bit irascible and prone to buck the strict authority of the Admiralty. Only a year before the Battle of Quiberon Bay, he had been in command of the Royal Navy blockade of Brest for six months when he became involved in a serious dispute with the authorities in London. Hawke lowered his flag and returned to port in response to what he believed was a personal slight.

Swallowing his pride, Hawke subsequently issued an apology for the episode and received a strong reprimand. His superiors understood that such a naval commander, with both experience and unquenchable fighting spirit, could not be spared in wartime, and Hawke was reinstated to command, returning to the blockade of Brest in the spring of 1759.

French Setback at Sea

In late summer, the French Mediterranean Fleet set sail from Toulon, intent on running the gauntlet of the Royal Navy's Mediterranean Fleet based at Gibraltar and reaching the Atlantic. The opposing naval forces fought the two-day Battle of Lagos southwest of the Gulf of Cadiz on August 18-19.

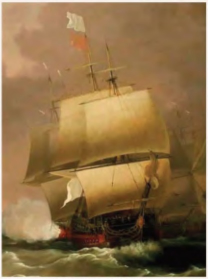
The Royal Navy squadron, under Admiral Edward Boscawen, thoroughly defeated the French, sinking two ships, capturing three, and ultimately blockading five in the neutral port of Cadiz. Only a single French warship managed to transit the British cordon and reach the Atlantic port of Rochefort. The southern arm of the French offensive was broken.

Choiseul, though, continued to promote the idea of invasion, despite the fact that the French squadron at Brest, strong on paper, was severely undermanned, plagued by shortages of food and supplies, and had recently endured an outbreak of typhoid that claimed thousands of lives. And, of course, there remained the problem of the blockading Royal Navy. To reach the assembled transports at Quiberon Bay, Conflans had to bide his time…waiting for an opportunity.

Measure for Measure

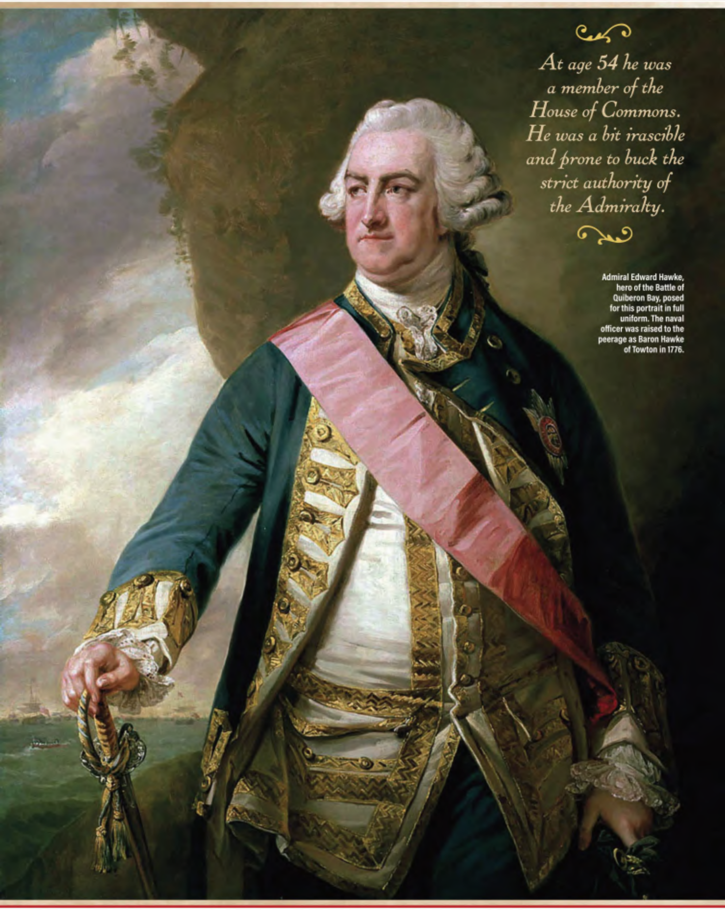
That opportunity came with the Atlantic gales of November. After three days of pounding from a westerly storm, Hawke was obliged to retire with the bulk of his 28-ship fleet to the shelter of the port of Torbay on England's southern coast. Hawke detailed an 'early warning' squadron of five 50-gun ships-of-the-line and eight frigates, under Captain Robert Duff, to the waters off Quiberon Bay to ride out the storm and raise the alarm should the French invasion force and its potent escort attempt to put to sea.

Meanwhile, a small force from the West Indies joined Conflans at Brest, and when word was received that most of Hawke's warships had retired to Torbay, the French commander set sail on November 14 and reached the open Atlantic. While the movement was sighted, difficulties in rough seas and French interference prevented news of Conflans' sortie from reaching Hawke until two days later. He put to sea with all haste. Duff had been warned of the French approach on the evening of the November 15 and ordered his squadron to weigh anchor in the midst of the howling gale.



The 80-gun ship-of-the-line *Soleil Royal*, flagship of Admiral Conflans at Quiberon Bay, is seen under full sail in this painting by artist Dominic Serres. *Soleil Royal* was burned after running aground.

Buffeted by the heavy seas and high winds, Conflans was 20 miles off Belle Isle, southwest of Quiberon Bay, on November 20 when his lookouts spotted Duff's small squadron. Realising that these British warships were not Hawke's main battle fleet, Conflans pursued Duff, who divided his ships to run north and south, buying time and hoping for Hawke's approach. Soon enough, French lookouts spotted a second gathering of sails to the west. Likewise, a British lookout aboard the 74-gun ship-of-the-line HMS *Magnanime* spotted the distant French fleet around 8:30am, and as Hawke ordered his warships into line abreast, Conflans made his fateful decision.



At age 54 he was a member of the House of Commons. He was a bit irascible and prone to buck the strict authority of the Admiralty.

Admiral Edward Hawke, hero of the Battle of Quiberon Bay, posed for this portrait in full uniform. The naval officer was raised to the peerage as Baron Hawke of Towton in 1776.

Collision Course at Quiberon Bay

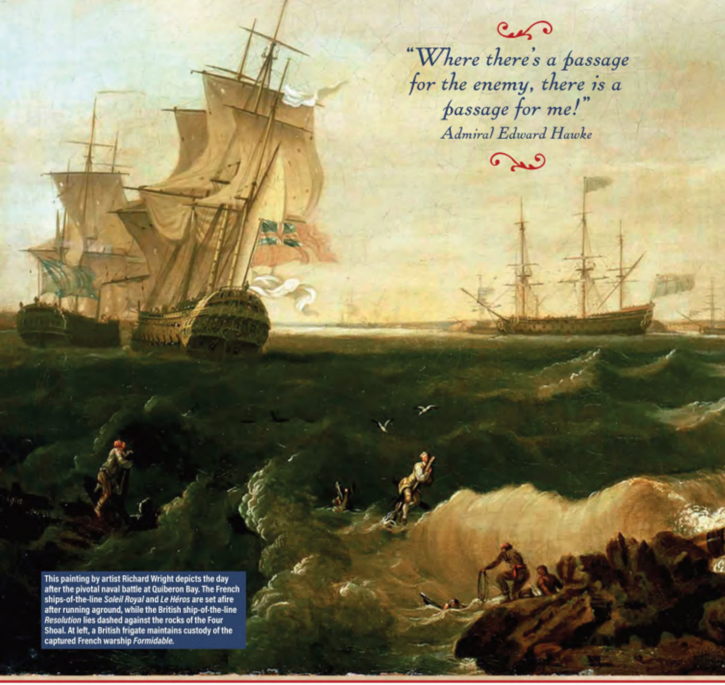
Unlike his adversary, Hawke had no real knowledge of the hazards beyond the narrow mouth of Quiberon Bay, and he decided – in essence – to allow the French to guide his ships into the treacherous narrows.

By 9am Hawke had given the signal for the general pursuit and ordered the first seven Royal Navy warships into line ahead with full sail, a dangerous proposition amid the heavy swells and whipping winds. Accepting the consequences of success or failure, he shouted, "Where there's a passage for the enemy, there is a passage for me! Where a Frenchman can sail, an Englishman can follow. Their pilots shall be ours. If they go to pieces in the shoals, they will serve as a beacon for us."

After hours of battling the elements and attempting to maintain the chase, in mid-afternoon, the first British shots thundered toward the rear guard of Conflans' retreating squadron, and the French commander heard the ominous reports of his enemy's guns. About 3pm, the winds shifted and began blowing from the northwest, impeding Conflans' progress toward the safety of the bay. The French commander ordered a turn in the direction of his pursuers, hoping to win the race to the open sea with those ships that were not already engaged with the British.

By the time Hawke and *Royal George* rounded the Cardinals, as the rocks at the outer limit of the Quiberon Peninsula were known, it was late afternoon, and *Le Formidable*, the 80-gun flagship of the French rear guard, was surrendering to the 74-gun HMS *Resolution*. Hours later, *Resolution* came to grief, dashed on the rocks, run aground and dismasted at the Four Shoal, a total loss. Hawke observed the French changing course and ordered *Royal George* to move alongside the 80-gun *Soleil Royal*. As 74-gun *Le Thésée* rushed to the aid of Conflans' flagship, HMS *Torbay* forced the French warship to turn sharply without closing its lower gun ports. *Le Thésée* foundered and capsized.

> *"Where there's a passage for the enemy, there is a passage for me!"*
> *Admiral Edward Hawke*



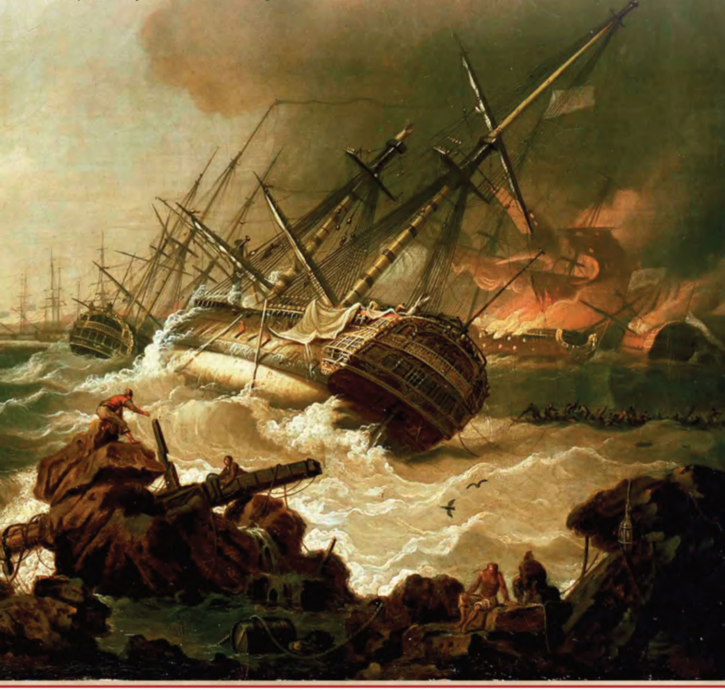
This painting by artist Richard Wright depicts the day after the pivotal naval battle at Quiberon Bay. The French ships-of-the-line *Soleil Royal* and *Le Héros* are set afire after running aground, while the British ship-of-the-line *Resolution* lies dashed against the rocks of the Four Shoal. At left, a British frigate maintains custody of the captured French warship *Formidable*.

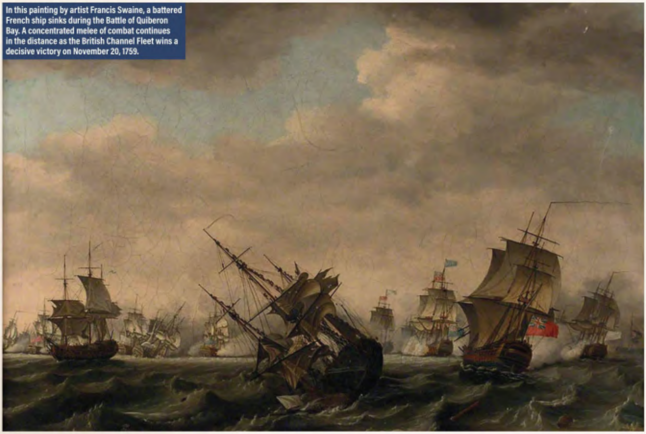
Royal George met the 70-gun *Superbe* and sank the French ship with a pair of well-placed broadsides. Still in pursuit of *Soleil Royal*, Hawke was again frustrated as the 74-gun *Intrépide* glided between the flagships and absorbed a tremendous broadside from *Royal George*. In the swirl of action, the 74-gun *Le Héros* struck her flag in submission to *Magnanime*; however, the British were unable to take control of the French warship in the confusion of battle.

In the gathering gloom, Conflans had failed to make good his escape before nightfall and ordered his remaining ships to anchor. *Soleil Royal* had been pushed to the south, leeward of the Four Shoal, and dropped anchor some distance from the other French warships. Hawke signalled his ships to anchor as well, but in the confusion only a few of them acknowledged the order. Several others continued to pursue fleeing French warships toward the mouth of the River Vilaine. Six of the French ships made it, but a seventh, the 64-gun *Inflexible*, ran aground.

During the uneasy hours after dark, several French ships managed to ease past the British and reach the Atlantic and the eventual safety of the harbour at Rochefort. Heavily damaged during the fighting, the 70-gun *Juste* wrecked against the rocks near St. Nazaire.

At sunrise, Conflans found to his consternation that both *Soleil Royal* and the damaged *Le Héros*, which had escaped the clutches of the British hours earlier, were anchored quite near to Hawke's still formidable fleet. Quickly, Conflans ordered the ships' lines cut in an attempt to reach the harbour at Le Croisic, northwest of St. Nazaire, but heavy seas forced both ships to run aground at the Four Shoal. As the British pursued, the 64-gun HMS *Essex* suffered a similar fate. On November 21, *Soleil Royal* was put to the torch on orders from Conflans, while a detail of British sailors set fire to *Le Héros*.





In this painting by artist Francis Swaine, a battered French ship sinks during the Battle of Quiberon Bay. A concentrated melee of combat continues in the distance as the British Channel Fleet wins a decisive victory on November 20, 1759.

BRITAIN REMAINS WARY

Despite the Royal Navy victory at Quiberon Bay, which extinguished the immediate threat of an invasion of the British Isles, the French never fully abandoned their desire for such an offensive. In turn, the Admiralty maintained a stalwart vigil against it.

After Quiberon Bay, Hawke again assumed command of the Royal Navy blockade off the port of Brest, and British resources were challenged with a commitment to keep French ships bottled up from the North Sea to the Mediterranean. Hawke launched an unsuccessful effort to destroy several French warships that had survived the defeat at Quiberon Bay, sending a flotilla of fire ships against them in the estuary of the River Vilaine.

The outspoken Hawke later opposed a plan to capture Belle Isle, off Brittany, for possible use as a base for raids against French coastal towns. True to form, he loudly denounced the scheme, raising the ire of powerful politicians, including William Pitt, the elder, leader of the renewed war effort that had brought about a reversal of fortune for Britain in the Seven Years War. In the event, Belle Isle was taken with heavy losses in the spring of 1761, and just as Hawke had predicted, no real advantage was gained. The French were indifferent to its occupation.

The offensive power of the French fleet was irretrievably broken at Quiberon Bay. Six ships-of-the-line had been destroyed, another taken as a prize, and 2,500 French sailors were dead. With the stunning triumph, Hawke had lost two ships-of-the-line to the combination of wicked weather and hazardous shoals, while 400 British seamen were killed.

In his report to the Admiralty, Hawke wrote in a rather subdued tone, "When I consider the season of the year, the hard gales on the day of action, a flying enemy, the shortness of the day, and the coast where we were on, I can boldly affirm that all that could possibly be done has been done."

The Consequences of Quiberon Bay

Perhaps Hawke had intended to describe his great victory at Quiberon Bay in understated prose, or perhaps he did not yet fully realise the implications of the battle's outcome.

The Royal Navy victory at Quiberon Bay, in fact, had seismic repercussions. It was, in many respects, the most significant of a series of British military victories in 1759, remembered as the annus mirabilis, or 'year of wonders'.

Not only was French sea power degraded substantially, but its weakened state was such that it could not escort, much less defend, convoys of reinforcing troops or badly needed supplies to French forces in North America. Effectively, the defeat sealed the fate of the French empire across the Atlantic. For the balance of the Seven Years War, British warships operated against French colonies and shipping virtually unimpeded. Hawke's victory at Quiberon Bay further ushered in a period of more than 150 years during which the ascendant Royal Navy became the world's dominant naval power. Britannia did indeed rule the waves.

In the wake of the Battle of Quiberon Bay, the Royal Navy blockade of French ports continued to strangle the French economy, exacerbating the country's financial difficulties amid a protracted war that had driven the government to the verge of bankruptcy. France's creditors winced with the realisation that the country was in economic peril due to the degradation of its navy.

Of utmost immediate importance, the French grand design for an invasion of Britain and the rapid conquest of the country's arch enemy swiftly evaporated.

When the Seven Years War ended with the 1763 Treaty of Paris, it was France that suffered significant territorial losses in North America and elsewhere, and Quiberon Bay was a turning point in the final British triumph.

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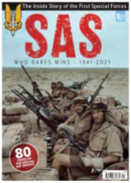
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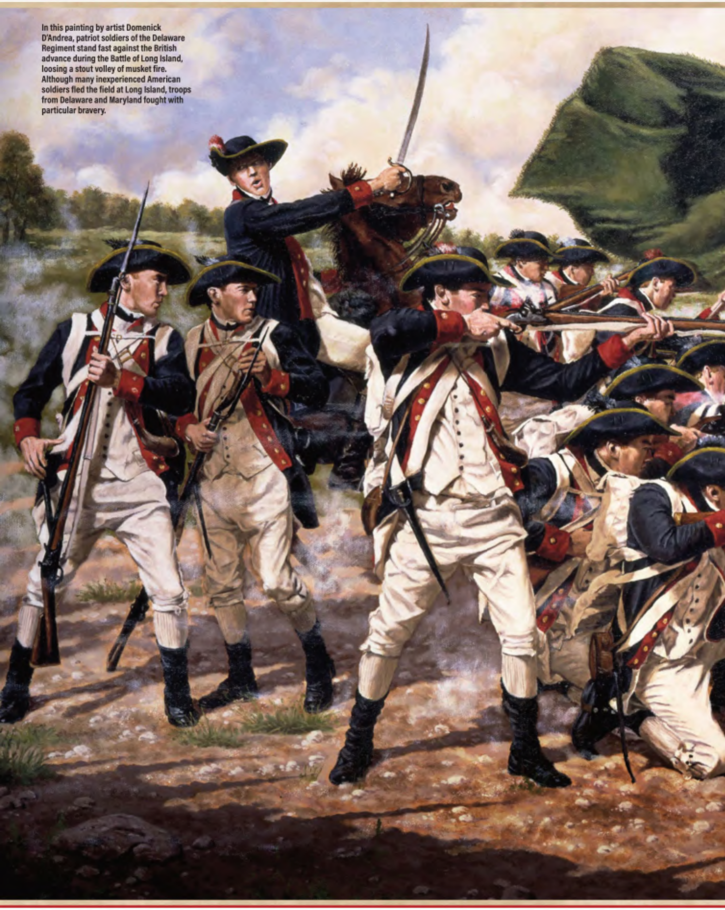
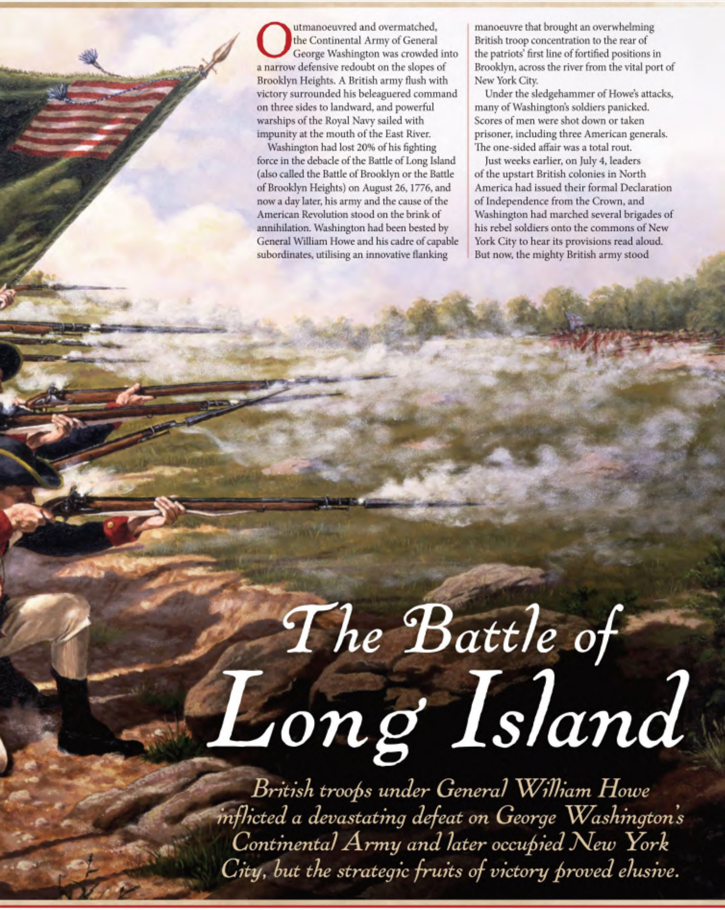


In this painting by artist Domenick D'Andrea, patriot soldiers of the Delaware Regiment stand fast against the British advance during the Battle of Long Island, loosing a stout volley of musket fire. Although many inexperienced American soldiers fled the field at Long Island, troops from Delaware and Maryland fought with particular bravery.



The Battle of Long Island

British troops under General William Howe inflicted a devastating defeat on George Washington's Continental Army and later occupied New York City, but the strategic fruits of victory proved elusive.

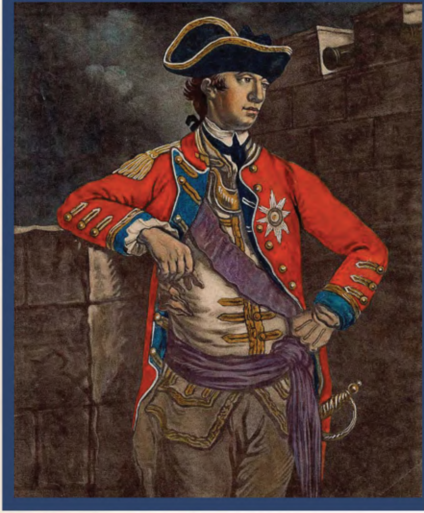
Outmanoeuvred and overmatched, the Continental Army of General George Washington was crowded into a narrow defensive redoubt on the slopes of Brooklyn Heights. A British army flush with victory surrounded his beleaguered command on three sides to landward, and powerful warships of the Royal Navy sailed with impunity at the mouth of the East River.

Washington had lost 20% of his fighting force in the debacle of the Battle of Long Island (also called the Battle of Brooklyn or the Battle of Brooklyn Heights) on August 26, 1776, and now a day later, his army and the cause of the American Revolution stood on the brink of annihilation. Washington had been bested by General William Howe and his cadre of capable subordinates, utilising an innovative flanking manoeuvre that brought an overwhelming British troop concentration to the rear of the patriots' first line of fortified positions in Brooklyn, across the river from the vital port of New York City.

Under the sledgehammer of Howe's attacks, many of Washington's soldiers panicked. Scores of men were shot down or taken prisoner, including three American generals. The one-sided affair was a total rout.

Just weeks earlier, on July 4, leaders of the upstart British colonies in North America had issued their formal Declaration of Independence from the Crown, and Washington had marched several brigades of his rebel soldiers onto the commons of New York City to hear its provisions read aloud. But now, the mighty British army stood

HOWE MEANT BUSINESS



One vignette during the Battle of Long Island does convey General William Howe's sense of duty and urgency. Howe accompanied General Henry Clinton's command during the flanking march that unhinged the left of the patriot line at Guan Heights.

During the night, as the British force marched toward Jamaica Pass, the troops stopped to rest in the vicinity of Howard's Tavern. The tavern owner, William Howard, and his son, William Jr., were pressed into service as guides for the remainder of the British march – but their cooperation was not secured without some drama.

William Howard, Jr., wrote of his experience: "...I was awakened by seeing a soldier at the side of my bed...General Howe and another officer were in the barroom... After asking for a glass of liquor from the bar, which was given him, he entered into familiar conversation with my father and among other things said, 'I must have some one of you to show me over the Rockaway Path around the pass.' My father replied, 'We belong to the other side, General, and can't serve you against our duty.'

"General Howe replied, 'That is alright; stick to your country, or stick to your principles, but Howard, you are my prisoner and must guide my men over the hill...You have no alternative. If you refuse, I shall shoot you through the head.'"

A veteran of British campaigns in North America, General William Howe commanded the army that defeated the patriots under George Washington on the field during the Battle of Long Island but failed to achieve strategic victory. Howe resigned his command of British forces in America in 1777.

poised to deliver the coup de grace to this revolution. Howe considered his options, and rather than mounting a direct frontal assault against the fortified patriot positions on Brooklyn Heights, decided to lay siege.

As precious hours slipped away, Washington saw his only hope to continue the fight. He mustered a flotilla of small boats to carry as many of his men as possible across the East River to the interim safety of Manhattan. In the predawn hours of August 29, 9,000 patriot troops were rowed across the river, under the noses of the British, victors on the tactical battlefield but failing to reap the long-term harvest of real strategic victory.

Washington's audacious retirement from the battlefield on Long Island saved his army to fight another day, while Howe's splendid triumph was essentially squandered. True enough, in the coming days the British inflicted further battlefield defeats on the Continental Army, occupying New York City and compelling Washington to abandon New York altogether, retreating across New Jersey into Pennsylvania. But the golden opportunity to crush the rebel army outright – and with it the heartbeat of the rebellion – had passed.

Prelude to Long Island

The first major victory of the American Revolution belonged to the rebels. British forces, surrounded in the peninsular city of Boston, Massachusetts, had been forced to evacuate to Halifax, Nova Scotia, in March 1776. During the respite that followed, General Washington realised that the British still maintained the strategic initiative, assessed the situation, and decided that their next logical offensive move would target New York City.

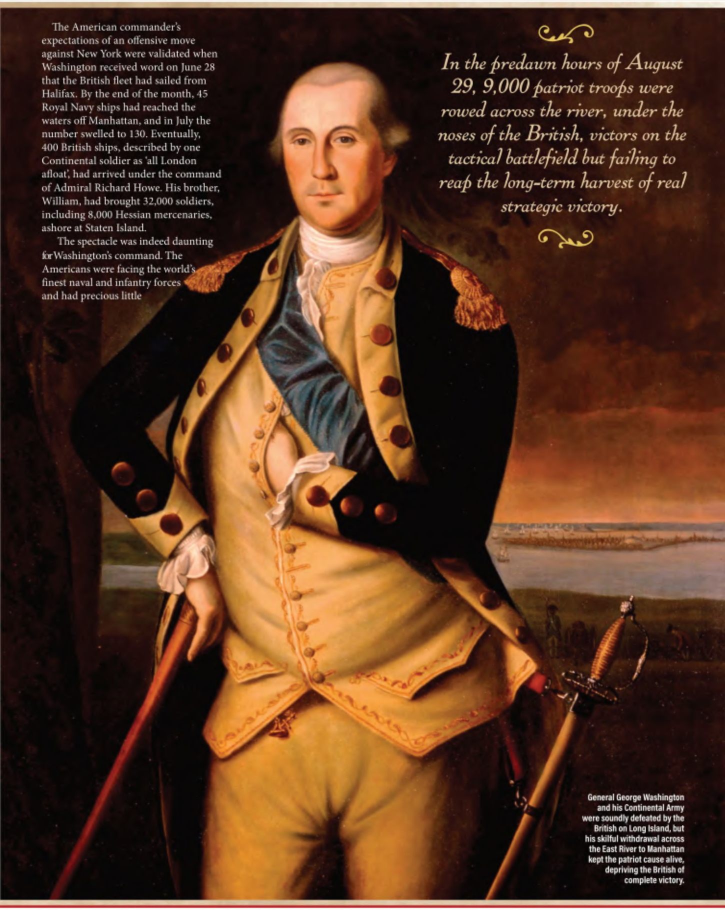
British control of New York, centrally located in the mid-Atlantic colonies, would secure a supply base from which to launch a campaign that might sever the northern rebellious colonies from those in the south. The Royal Navy might extend coastal operations against the rebels and rally Loyalist sentiment with sorties up the East and Hudson rivers. Should the Continental Army be brought to battle and soundly defeated, so much the better.

While time permitted, Washington moved to defend New York, arriving there in April while 19,000 troops of the Continental Army were marched in as well. Fortifications were positioned to repel the expected British attacks, but Washington understood that holding the city would be a tremendous challenge with the Royal Navy controlling the waters off the harbour itself. Nevertheless, he prepared the defences as best he could while facing another dilemma. When the British came – if they came – would their attack be directed against Manhattan or Long Island? Washington believed the primary British objective was Manhattan and initially acted accordingly.

The American commander's expectations of an offensive move against New York were validated when Washington received word on June 28 that the British fleet had sailed from Halifax. By the end of the month, 45 Royal Navy ships had reached the waters off Manhattan, and in July the number swelled to 130. Eventually, 400 British ships, described by one Continental soldier as 'all London afloat', had arrived under the command of Admiral Richard Howe. His brother, William, had brought 32,000 soldiers, including 8,000 Hessian mercenaries, ashore at Staten Island.

The spectacle was indeed daunting for Washington's command. The Americans were facing the world's finest naval and infantry forces and had precious little

> *In the predawn hours of August 29, 9,000 patriot troops were rowed across the river, under the noses of the British, victors on the tactical battlefield but failing to reap the long-term harvest of real strategic victory.*



General George Washington and his Continental Army were soundly defeated by the British on Long Island, but his skilful withdrawal across the East River to Manhattan kept the patriot cause alive, depriving the British of complete victory.

military experience themselves. Although Washington had managed to instil some measure of discipline, the British were confident that these citizen-soldiers posed no credible threat to their highly-trained, professional troops.

Washington remained unsure where the British would attack and divided his army. When the British began landing 15,000 soldiers under Generals Henry Clinton and Charles Cornwallis at Gravesend Bay, Long Island, on the morning of August 22, Washington received word of the movement but was misinformed that the British force was only about half its actual size. The British troops skirmished with Pennsylvanians under Colonel Edward Hand, but the Americans withdrew before a general engagement flared, burning buildings, and destroying crops and livestock that could have been confiscated by the British as they retreated.

Washington believed the landing might well be a feint to draw attention away from a main British thrust to take Manhattan. He reinforced the defenders of Long Island, under General Israel Putnam, raising their number to about 6,500. Further dispositions just prior to the battle increased patriot strength on western Long Island to 9,000 troops.

Putnam's defences on Long Island consisted of two perpendicular lines. The first included 3,000 troops manning hills rising up to 150 feet at the Guan Heights, while the second line, defended by 6,000 soldiers, faced southeast across Brooklyn Heights, and ran 1.5 miles from Gowanus Creek to Wallabout Bay. The Guan Heights line covered three passes towards Brooklyn Heights along Gowanus Road, Flatbush Road, and Bedford Road, west to east.

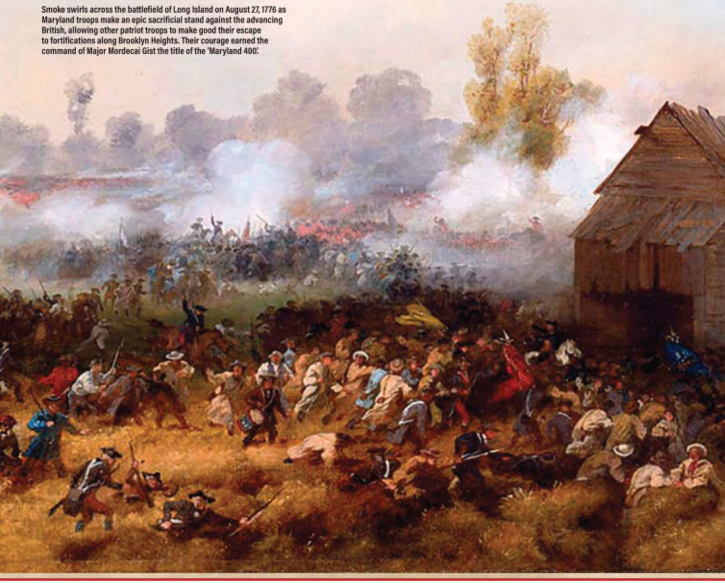
An Undefended Passage

Additional landings of British troops just southeast of Denys's Point brought Howe's total strength to 20,000, more than twice that of the rebel defenders. As they advanced, the British were greeted by a number of loyalists, who served as guides and offered information on the patriot troop dispositions.

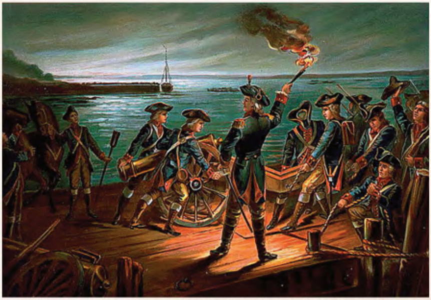
One loyalist advised General Clinton that a fourth passage through the Guan Heights was located near the eastern end of the high ground. The Jamaica Pass was said to be virtually undefended. Clinton sent a message to Howe urging a flanking movement through the Jamaica Pass that would take Putnam's defensive line from the flank and rear.

Howe's response was affirmative. Clinton was ordered to lead the flanking march on the night of August 26 with 10,000 troops. Meanwhile, British soldiers under General James Grant and the Hessians troops led by General Leopold Philip de Heister were to engage the right and centre of the American defence line at Guan Heights as a diversion, keeping them occupied while Clinton manoeuvred to strike.

Three Loyalist farmers led Clinton's troops as



Smoke swirls across the battlefield of Long Island on August 27, 1776 as Maryland troops make an epic sacrificial stand against the advancing British, allowing other patriot troops to make good their escape to fortifications along Brooklyn Heights. Their courage earned the command of Major Mordecai Gist the title of the 'Maryland 400'.



Soldiers of the Continental Army wrestle a cannon aboard a barge during their retreat from Brooklyn Heights to Manhattan. Approximately 9,000 patriot troops and most of their equipment were evacuated from a British trap under cover of darkness and fog as hearty men from Marblehead, Massachusetts, fisherman and sailors in civilian life, manned small boats to accomplish the task.

they stepped off at 9pm on August 26. Their campfires were left burning to deceive any American observers that they had remained in place. The column reached Howard's Tavern, stopping briefly to coerce the tavern owner and his son to guide some of Clinton's soldiers along an old Indian trail parallel to the edge of Jamaica Pass. Moments later, the forward elements of the British column encountered only five patriot militiamen guarding the passage. These men were scooped up as prisoners, and by sunrise Clinton's entire force had passed around the patriot flank, poised to launch an attack from the east.

Some accounts, apparently at odds with the more widely accepted narrative, assert that patriot Colonel Samuel Miles was alarmed by the sounds of gunfire as Grant's soldiers fought with American troops before dawn on August 27 and moved west toward the action with about 500 troops, leaving the Jamaica Pass undefended. Further, the sources suggest that Miles was sent back to his original post when American officers realised that the passage was open. Miles was tardy, only spotting the tail of Clinton's column, which he attacked with half his force while sending the other half toward the remainder of the patriot positions on the Guan Heights to warn of the British flanking march. Miles' strike on Clinton's rear was a failure, and he was taken prisoner along with most of his 250 attackers.

Regardless of the circumstances that left Jamaica Pass unguarded, the British storm broke a short while later.

Lightning on Long Island

As Clinton deployed, Grant was already on the move toward the Red Lion Inn, a local landmark, brushing aside Pennsylvania troops who briefly resisted and capturing their commander, Major Edward Burd. More Pennsylvanians were rallied to block the British advance, while the 1st Delaware and 1st Maryland regiments were rushed to their support. General William Alexander, a British-born soldier who preferred to be called Lord Stirling, led these reinforcements, 1,600 strong. Putnam was awakened at about 3am and signalled Washington of the developing battle. Washington arrived from Manhattan around 8am.

Taking possession of a pair of small hills, Stirling ordered his men to open fire as the British reached a marshy area along the Gowanus Road. Southeast of the American positions, a 220-foot rise, later known as Battle Hill, became the focus of a British flanking movement. Heavy fighting ensued as the two sides struggled for possession of Battle Hill with the British gaining the upper hand but then being pushed off the summit. Both sides took casualties, and among them were Colonel Caleb Perry of Pennsylvania along with British Colonel James Grant (not to be confused with General James Grant), shot dead by a Pennsylvania sniper.

General John Sullivan commanded 1,800 American troops covering the Bedford and Flatbush roads, and de Heister's artillery had taken them under fire before 9am, when Clinton ordered two cannon shots fired, a prearranged signal for the Hessian infantry to attack Sullivan through what came to be known as Battle Pass. Until the Hessians infantry became engaged, the American commanders believed Grant's thrust along the Gowanus Road was the main British attack, so much that Sullivan had weakened his own position by sending 400 troops to support Stirling.

Minutes later, Sullivan was under attack on two sides as Clinton advanced from the flank. The American commander divided his force, turning with the bulk of his command to face Clinton while a smaller contingent tried to hold against the Hessians. A sharp encounter followed, Hessian and patriot soldiers fighting hand to hand. Muskets were discharged and then used as clubs, bayonets stabbed, and fists were flung. The pressure was too great, and the American left wing disintegrated. Sullivan was taken prisoner, but some of his soldiers made good their escape to Brooklyn Heights.

A Stirling Performance

Most likely from a position at Putnam's headquarters on Brooklyn Heights, Washington watched the battle unfold. Although the situation on the left was coming apart, Stirling held his own against Grant's repeated assaults on the right. In the confusion of battle, Stirling was still probably unaware

of Clinton's successful flank attack. His troops fought doggedly for at least four hours against Grant on his front and the surging Hessians to his left. Two thousand fresh British troops struck Stirling's centre around 11am, forcing him to pull back. Only one avenue of retreat was open as Clinton advanced to his rear while Grant and Heister pushed ahead.

Stirling ordered his troops to begin crossing Gowanus Creek, retiring toward Brooklyn Heights as he and Major Mordecai Gist, leading the 1st Maryland Regiment, patched together a rear guard in the vicinity of the Vechte-Cortelyou House (also identified as the Old Stone House) to stave off the British. While some Delaware soldiers were probably involved in the delaying action, Gist's command gained lasting fame as the 'Maryland 400', soldiers who valiantly held the line and allowed others to escape death or capture.

> *Stirling ordered his troops to begin crossing Gowanus Creek.*

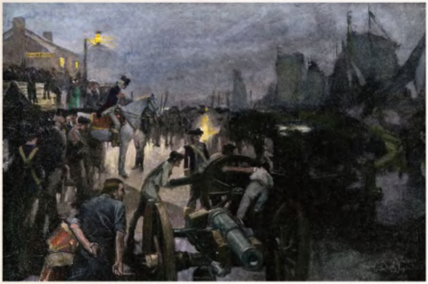
Supported by a pair of cannon, British soldiers occupied the Vechte-Cortelyou house and took positions in the surrounding fields as patriot soldiers fell back in a fighting retreat. Half the 1st Maryland Regiment managed to cross Gowanus Creek, escaping to the fortifications on Brooklyn Heights, while Stirling and Gist mounted at least two counterattacks. Washington was reported to have observed the fight and remarked: "Good God! What brave fellows I must this day lose!"

There may actually have been fewer than 400 Marylanders involved in the heroic stand, and the spirited fight continued for some time, until the sheer weight of British numbers began to overwhelm them. Stirling and a small group of patriots were surrounded and captured by the Hessians. A total of 256 Marylanders were reported killed or taken prisoner during the valiant encounter, and casualty estimates run as high as 80% of their number; some sources claim that fewer than a dozen men survived. Gist was among them, and he continued to serve through to the end of the war.

Survival by Sea

As the patriot defenders fell back to Brooklyn Heights, Howe's subordinate commanders urged that the surge forward continue. They implored Howe to allow them to finish off Washington's army; however, the general chose to halt, dig in, and wait. He believed that the Continental Army was trapped in a vice, his army on land and the Royal Navy by sea. Perhaps Howe's decision was influenced by the memory of the high cost in dead and wounded that the patriots exacted against British frontal assaults at Bunker Hill a few months earlier. The weather was deteriorating as well and could have severely hampered further offensive operations.

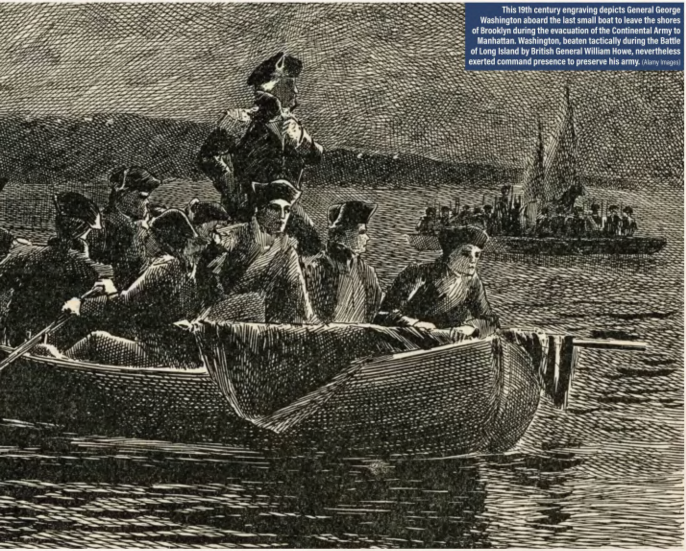
On August 28, torrential rain prevented movement by either side. High winds stopped the Royal Navy warships from moving further up the East River and tightening the British grip on the beleaguered Americans. For Washington, the foul weather was fortuitous. He devised a desperate plan to extricate his battered army from an untenable situation.



Mounted on a white charger, General George Washington observes the evacuation of his Continental Army from an untenable position at Brooklyn Heights in the aftermath of the Battle of Long Island. The successful evacuation kept Washington's army in the field as a viable force and sustained the imperilled revolutionary cause. (Alamy Images)

Washington brought another 1,200 men to Brooklyn Heights from Manhattan, including two regiments from Pennsylvania under Brigadier General Thomas Mifflin and a third from Marblehead, Massachusetts, led by Colonel John Glover. Many of the men from Marblehead were sailors and fishermen by trade, experienced in handling small craft, deftly manoeuvring them along shore and shoal, through waters deep and shallow. Washington sent a message to General William Heath at Kings Bridge, further north along the East River, ordering him to muster every barge, flatboat, or small sailing craft in the vicinity.

At first, Washington considered using the small boats to ferry troops across New York harbour from New Jersey to strengthen his position. But during a council of war on the afternoon of August 29, his lieutenants persuaded him that retreat was the better course of action. Mifflin and his Pennsylvanians, then, would serve as the rear guard while Glover's men manned the small craft to transport as many soldiers as possible across the East River to Manhattan.



This 19th century engraving depicts General George Washington aboard the last small boat to leave the shores of Brooklyn during the evacuation of the Continental Army to Manhattan. Washington, beaten tactically during the Battle of Long Island by British General William Howe, nevertheless exerted command presence to preserve his army. (Alamy Images)

The orders were passed, strict silence was maintained, and the operation got underway during the night. It was still in progress as the sun rose, but a heavy fog blanketed the area, obscuring the movement from the British. By 7am on August 30, 9,000 American soldiers, along with much of their supplies and equipment, had been evacuated, the British unaware all the while. There were no patriot casualties.

Long Island Legacy

Howe was astonished when he received news that his soldiers had discovered empty earthworks where the Americans had been hours earlier. His army had inflicted a devastating defeat on the Americans, who suffered tremendous losses, 300 killed, 800 wounded, and 1,079 taken prisoner. In exchange, the British lost 64 dead, 293 wounded, and 31 missing or captured.

However, the final, telling blow against Washington and the Continental Army could not be delivered. Occupying the positions on Brooklyn Heights, Howe remained there for two weeks before finally resuming the offensive and soon taking possession of New York City. Although a brief setback occurred with a patriot counterattack at Harlem Heights, the British won battles at White Plains and Fort Washington. Again, these were tactical victories, and though news of the successes brought great celebration and optimism in the halls of British government – and even the streets of London – all were inconclusive.

Their battlefield triumph at Long Island reinforced the British sentiment that their military prowess would ultimately prevail. Low regard for the ability of the Americans to fight engendered a growing sense of optimism and a general disdain for the upstart colonial armed forces. A so-called 'victory disease' may well have influenced the future conduct of British military operations in the Colonies, to the benefit of the Americans, whose martial capabilities would, in fact, steadily improve.

The British army in North America further became mired in a series of misleading tactical victories that fostered the illusion that total victory was near. However, as long as Washington's army was in the field, the revolution lived. Eventually, the British people tired of the war in America, both in terms of lengthening casualty rolls and its ever-increasing financial burden. Such a series of circumstances traced its roots to the 'victory' in the Battle of Long Island.

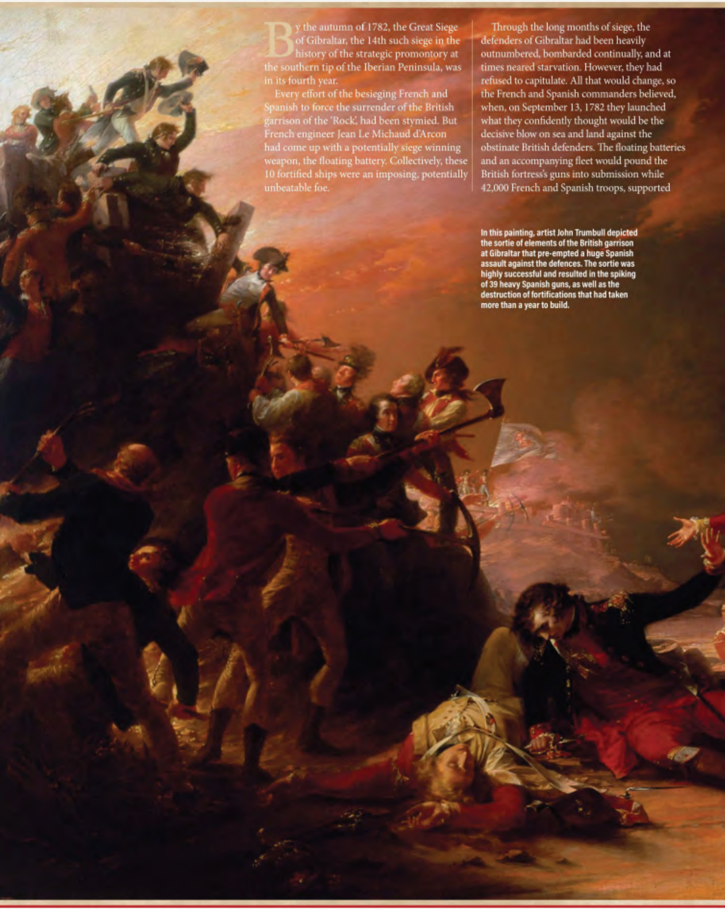
In retrospect, Washington's escape from almost certain catastrophic defeat saved the rebellion and raised the morale of the remaining patriot troops. The evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk during World War Two nearly two centuries later had a similar effect on British morale.

The outcome of the Battle of Long Island, then, was secondary to the conclusion leaders on both sides should have reached: the American Revolution would neither be won nor lost in a few days or months. The struggle was destined for a long and costly course, and then an ending that perhaps few would have initially thought possible.

By the autumn of 1782, the Great Siege of Gibraltar, the 14th such siege in the history of the strategic promontory at the southern tip of the Iberian Peninsula, was in its fourth year.

Every effort of the besieging French and Spanish to force the surrender of the British garrison of the 'Rock', had been stymied. But French engineer Jean Le Michaud d'Arcon had come up with a potentially siege winning weapon, the floating battery. Collectively, these 10 fortified ships were an imposing, potentially unbeatable foe.

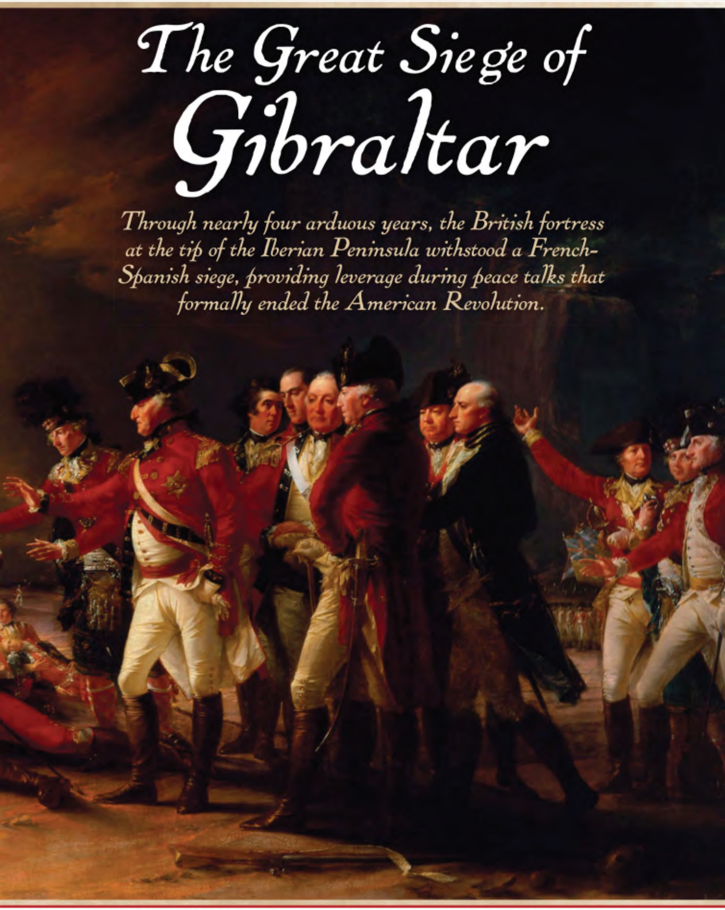
Through the long months of siege, the defenders of Gibraltar had been heavily outnumbered, bombarded continually, and at times neared starvation. However, they had refused to capitulate. All that would change, so the French and Spanish commanders believed, when, on September 13, 1782 they launched what they confidently thought would be the decisive blow on sea and land against the obstinate British defenders. The floating batteries and an accompanying fleet would pound the British fortress's guns into submission while 42,000 French and Spanish troops, supported



In this painting, artist John Trumbull depicted the sortie of elements of the British garrison at Gibraltar that pre-empted a huge Spanish assault against the defences. The sortie was highly successful and resulted in the spiking of 39 heavy Spanish guns, as well as the destruction of fortifications that had taken more than a year to build.

The Great Siege of Gibraltar

Through nearly four arduous years, the British fortress at the tip of the Iberian Peninsula withstood a French-Spanish siege, providing leverage during peace talks that formally ended the American Revolution.



by heavy artillery fire, would advance across the narrow isthmus that separated Spanish territory from the three square miles of the defiant British Rock, breach the defences, and win the day.

At stake was the recovery of Gibraltar itself, territory Spain had ceded to Britain in 1704 at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession. Further, both France and Spain had watched Great Britain become mired in the costly, resource devouring American Revolution. France had entered the war on the side of the rebellious North American colonies in 1778, after the stunning patriot victory over the British at the Battle of Saratoga the previous year, and Spain followed in 1779. These traditional adversaries of Britain saw opportunities for redress of the balance of power in Europe, the recovery of other lost territories during a series of earlier conflicts, and enhanced trade and fishing rights that might be reaped should ongoing peace negotiations in Paris conclude favourably.

Approximately 80,000 spectators, among them members of the French and Spanish nobility, gathered to witness what would surely be the humbling of the haughty British foe that September day. However, events transpired quite differently. In dramatic fashion, the defenders of Gibraltar not only withstood the bombardment of the floating batteries, but also set every one of them aflame. For the French and Spanish, the spectacular defeat was humiliating.

The debacle before the guns of Fortress Gibraltar plunged a proverbial dagger into the heart of French and Spanish ambitions to capture the British bastion. The land assault slated to begin the following day was cancelled as the resolve of the French commander, Louis des Balbes de Berton, Duc de Crillon, crumbled.

It was apparent that the siege had become an exercise in French and Spanish futility. Beyond the immediate retention of their prized possession, the British defenders had handed tremendous leverage to their delegation at the negotiating table in Paris, and the terms of the treaties ultimately signed there in September 1783 were indeed more favourable to Britain.

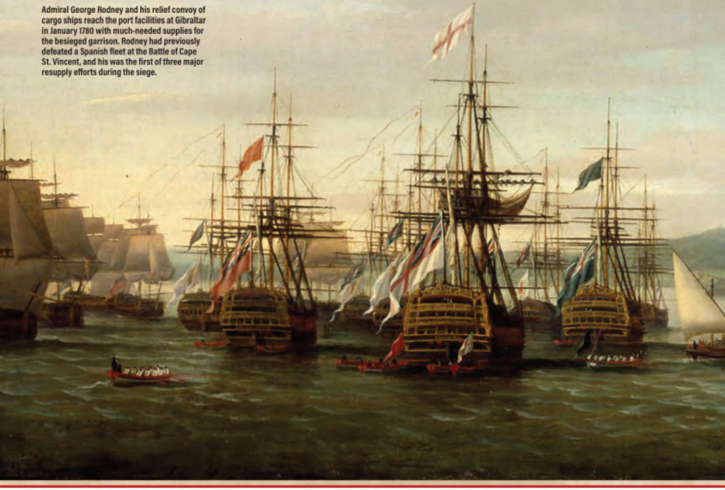
The Great Siege of Gibraltar was, in effect, the largest and last battle of the American Revolution, although the Americans did not directly participate. A preliminary treaty had been reached between Britain and its former Colonies in November 1782, but the final peace documents signed by British and American diplomats on September 3, 1783 reshaped the future of the fledgling United States and all of North America.

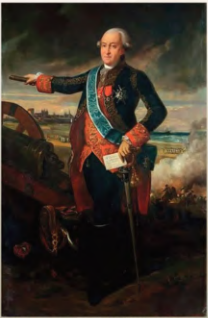
Road to Resolution on the Rock

Defeat at the Battle of Yorktown in October, 1781 had essentially signalled the end of British military operations in North America, and the rebellious colonists had secured their independence from the Crown. However, there was unfinished business in Europe, and the final curtain of the American Revolution came down two years later, only after France and Spain had failed to take the fortress of Gibraltar from the British in a prolonged siege that lasted three years, seven months and 12 days.

After Britain had taken control of Gibraltar in 1704 via the Treaty of Utrecht, Spanish enmity smouldered for the return of its lost territory where the Mediterranean Sea meets the vast Atlantic Ocean. Meanwhile, France had also recognised a favourable moment for action against Britain in the hopes of avenging its humiliating defeat in the Seven Years' War two decades earlier. France and Spain further intended to eventually launch an invasion of

Admiral George Rodney and his relief convoy of cargo ships reach the port facilities at Gibraltar in January 1780 with much-needed supplies for the besieged garrison. Rodney had previously defeated a Spanish fleet at the Battle of Cape St. Vincent, and his was the first of three major resupply efforts during the siege.





The French commander during the Great Siege of Gibraltar, Louis des Balbes de Berton, Duc de Crillon, was unable to successfully subdue the British garrison during the prolonged siege that ended in frustration and failure in February 1783.

Britain itself; a successful military campaign on British soil would end the war with a resounding victory.

Spain moved to isolate Gibraltar by mid-1779, its armed forces, under General Martin Alvarez de Sotomayor, initially deploying about 14,000 soldiers on land, while warships stretched a blockade to prevent reinforcements and supplies from reaching the British garrison. The blockade varied in effectiveness, and as the siege progressed its inability to thwart British resupply efforts contributed mightily to the failure of the allied initiative. Although blockade runners brought in a steady trickle of supplies, these alone could not sustain the defenders, and three substantial relief convoys were required.

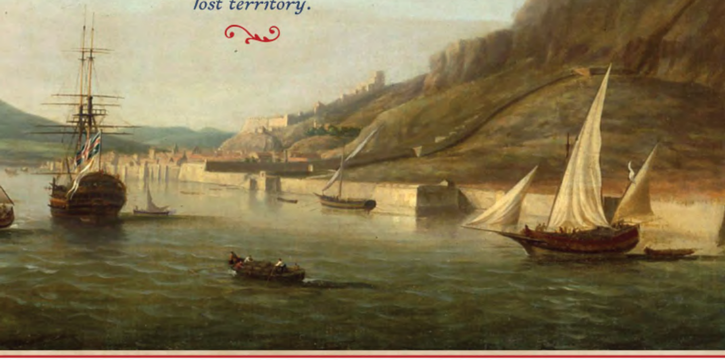
Responding to the looming threat, in the spring of 1777 the British dispatched Lieutenant General George Augustus Eliott to Gibraltar as governor general and commander of the garrison, which numbered about 4,000 troops. A veteran of the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War, Eliott was 60 years old, a strict disciplinarian, and a vegetarian who shunned alcohol. Recognising that the defences of Gibraltar had been allowed to deteriorate in prior years, he set about strengthening the fortifications, embarking on an ambitious building program.

Among other fortifications, British soldiers built the King's Bastion, an impressive stone structure housing 26 heavy guns, along the Gibraltar waterfront. Opposing Spanish entrenchments on the isthmus to the landward side, the Grand Battery stood at the La Porte gate. These fortifications anchored the defences of Gibraltar, and throughout the siege Eliott increased the number of cannon and mortars as he was able.

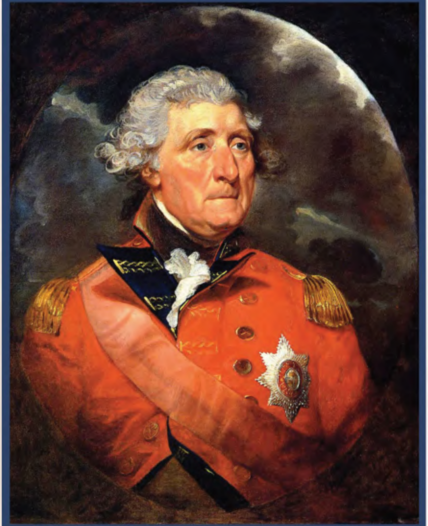
By the time Spain officially declared war on Britain, Eliott's command had grown to nearly 5,400 soldiers, including the 12th, 39th, 56th, and 58th regiments of foot, the 72nd Royal Manchester Volunteers, five companies of Royal Artillery, a brigade of Royal Marines, three German regiments from Hanover, and a small contingent of Corsicans.

During the early months of the siege, Spanish warships shelled the fortifications of Gibraltar and inflicted damage on the town, while Sotomayor directed several small-scale probing assaults against the British defences. No consequential fighting took place, and the prospect of a long and arduous siege was becoming real to both sides.

Spanish enmity smouldered for the return of its lost territory.



BRITISH INNOVATION AT GIBRALTAR



For his heroism and leadership during the British victory in the Great Siege of Gibraltar, General George Augustus Eliott was raised to the peerage as the 1st Baron Heathfield of Gibraltar.

The outnumbered garrison of Gibraltar displayed remarkable resourcefulness during the prolonged siege. Three significant innovations helped the defending British to secure a great victory against long odds.

One of these was the result of a pronouncement from General Eliott in the spring of 1782 that he would award a financial prize to any soldier who could develop a method for moving artillery to the north face of the Rock, where the guns might enfilade Spanish lines. Sergeant Major Henry Ince, a member of the artificer contingent (forerunner of the Royal Engineers), suggested that, rather than trying to drag guns up the exterior of the promontory, it was feasible to dig tunnels and galleries directly into the rock to provide artillery emplacements. By September, a battery of 24-pounder cannon was in action on the north face, and others followed.

In addition, Lieutenant George Koehler invented the depressing gun carriage, which allowed a cannon to be fired at a low angle, down the slope of the Rock, as well as at standard elevation for distant fire. Such carriages were deployed effectively from the heights of Gibraltar and assisted greatly in repelling allied infantry attacks.

Perhaps the most telling of British innovations was that of 'red hot shot,' artillery projectiles that were heated to extreme temperatures over grates near gun emplacements before they were loaded and fired against the French and Spanish. Nicknamed 'hot potatoes,' these super-heated projectiles were introduced in Gibraltar, later coming into widespread use. They were particularly effective in setting off powder magazines and starting fires.

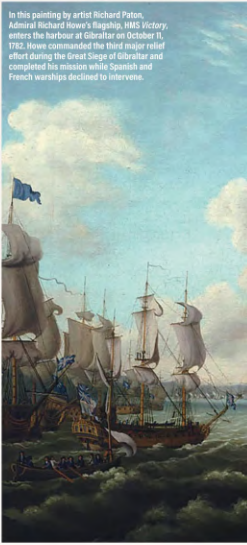
During the attack of the floating batteries, the British use of red hot shot was responsible for the failure of the ships' enhanced protection. The heavy wooden planks, wet sand, and water pumps were overmatched by the incendiary capability of the heated projectiles.

Saga of Siege and Succour

By the winter of 1779, the garrison of Gibraltar and its civilian population had begun to suffer from shortages of food and medicine, while scurvy was rife due to a lack of fresh vegetables containing Vitamin C. Even wood for fires was in short supply. Nevertheless, British soldiers stood to their posts, resisted the Spanish forays as necessary, and endured, as did the townspeople.

Early in the siege, it became apparent to Eliott that he could hold out only if substantial supplies were brought to Gibraltar on a consistent basis. He maintained regular contact with London, messages on the state of affairs being delivered via blockade runners. His pleas were heeded, and by the end of 1779, a substantial relief convoy, under Admiral George Rodney, had set sail from the English Channel for Gibraltar.

Rodney executed a brilliant tactical operation, capturing a Spanish supply convoy of 22 ships off Cape Finisterre and defeating a Spanish flotilla sent to interdict the British



In this painting by artist Richard Paton, Admiral Richard Howe's flagship, HMS *Victory*, enters the harbour at Gibraltar on October 11, 1782. Howe commanded the third major relief effort during the Great Siege of Gibraltar and completed his mission while Spanish and French warships declined to intervene.

effort during the Battle of Cape St. Vincent on January 16, 1780. Rodney's warships captured four Spanish ships-of-the-line and sank another, inflicting 2,500 casualties on the enemy while sustaining only 134 killed and wounded. The British force sailed into Gibraltar harbour on January 25, brushing aside interference from blockading Spanish ships, and delivered badly needed supplies along with nearly 1,100 additional troops of the 73rd Highland Regiment. The brilliant operation brought the defenders enough sustenance for six months.

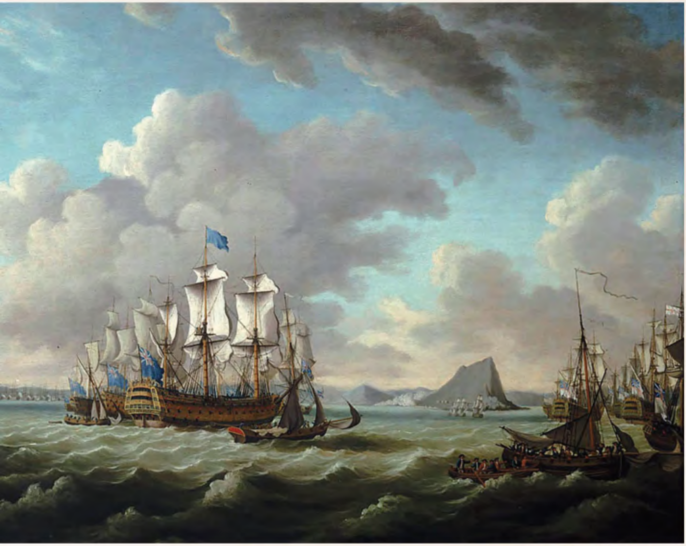
Spanish artillery fire was steady, but Gibraltar's defenders successfully resisted every attempt to take the Rock by infantry assault. In early June, the Spanish mounted an attack with fire ships, hoping the flames would consume the cluster of British merchantmen, Royal Navy warships, and blockade runners anchored within the harbour. The 28-gun frigate HMS *Enterprise* raised the alarm, and British batteries blazed away while sailors manned longboats and used grappling hooks to pull the fire ships away from the concentration of vessels. While the Spanish were preoccupied with their attack, a single blockade runner slipped into the harbour, delivering a cargo of leather and poultry to the British.

A smallpox epidemic raged in the summer of 1780, killing 50 soldiers and 450 civilians, and the second winter of the siege of Gibraltar proved as difficult as the first. Disease continued to take its toll, while rations were severely restricted amid the spectre of starvation. Spanish efforts to advance the siege included continuing interdiction of small fishing boats attempting to bring their catch to shore and the construction of additional earthworks, redoubts, and artillery emplacements down the landward isthmus.

In January 1781, Eliott received encouraging news that a second large supply convoy was being assembled. Logistics were a continuing challenge for the British, and the 100 cargo vessels and 29 escorting warships of the Royal Navy, under Admiral George Darby, did not depart home waters until mid-March. The voyage to Gibraltar harbour required a month across the stormy Atlantic. Interference from the Spanish fleet, which continually displayed ineptitude or outright evasion of the British escorts, was virtually non-existent.

While the merchant ships unloaded at Gibraltar's docks, heavy Spanish guns erupted in a strong bombardment, but the precious stores were landed almost intact. Although the unloading operation was out of range, the Spanish guns still inflicted heavy damage on the town and numerous defensive fortifications. Darby sailed for England on April 21, carrying 1,000 civilians to safety and relieving Eliott of the responsibility of feeding and caring for them. Again, the Spanish navy failed to impede the British fleet's departure. Adding insult to injury, three British frigates arrived from the island of Minorca unmolested on April 24, delivering more supplies and ammunition.

As summer gave way to autumn and the approach of another miserable winter, Eliott



received the disconcerting news that a force of 8,000 Spanish and French soldiers led by de Crillon had landed on Minorca. The island fell to the invaders in February 1782, eliminating a British base of supply.

Thrust and Counterthrust

Amid Eliott's rising concerns, the Spanish drew their siege lines closer to Gibraltar's fortress walls. New earthworks and redoubts were constructed, and dozens of heavy 24-pounder guns and siege mortars were moved in. Although a British shell detonated a huge powder magazine and the resulting blast inflicted heavy casualties, the Spanish were undeterred. By late November, the British had received word from an enemy deserter that a tremendous infantry assault was planned.

Rather than waiting to receive the Spanish onslaught, Eliott resolved to assume a limited offensive posture. To that end, he organised a pre-emptive strike against the enemy. On the night of November 26, hours before the Spanish had intended to launch their own attack, Brigadier William Ross led approximately 2,500 troops, divided into three columns, against the Spanish entrenchments.

Taking the enemy by complete surprise, British and Hanoverian troops overran artillery positions at bayonet point, spiked 39 big guns, destroyed supplies, and put stores of black powder to the torch, resulting in tremendous explosions. The British killed or wounded more than 100 enemy soldiers while losing only two dead and 25 wounded. Eliott himself came out to observe the splendidly executed operation, which struck a severe blow to Spanish morale.

French Forward

In early 1782, the French arrived in force from Minorca, and de Crillon assumed overall command of the allied siege. The effort then took on a new perspective as the concept of the floating batteries emerged.

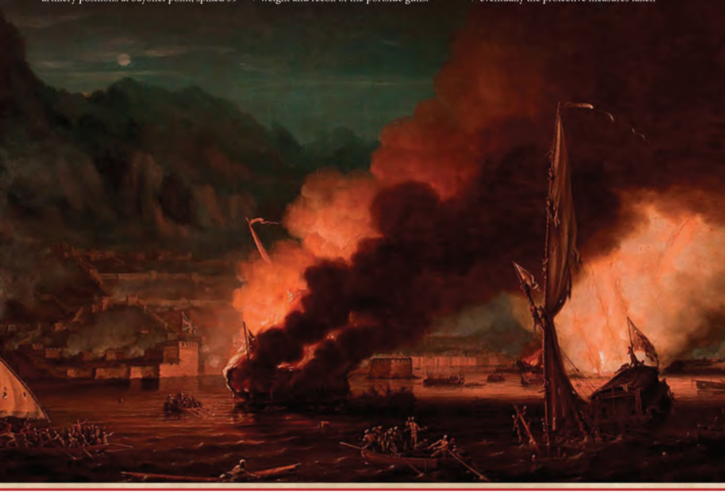
An ingenious idea on paper, the floating batteries were intended for close bombardment of the British fortifications as the linchpin of the combined land-sea assault that would finally compel the British to surrender. The large ships were modified, all guns removed from their starboard sides and placed to port. Thick wooden timbers, three feet wide, were fastened tightly together for superior strength to withstand British shot and shell, while layers of wet sand and a water pumping system were added to stifle any flames that might erupt during the fighting. Holds were filled with ballast to counter the weight and recoil of the portside guns.

A summer lull was ominous, and Eliott was unsettled by reports that a massive, allied attack was coming. During an episode of intermittent artillery fire a Spanish shell detonated a powder magazine at Princess Anne's Battery, taking the lives of 19 British soldiers.

Float and Flame

By 9.45am on September 13, the floating batteries, under the command of Don Buenaventura Moreno, had sortied from their base at Algeciras across the Bay of Gibraltar toward the British fortress. Supporting them were 49 ships-of-the-line, 40 Spanish gunboats, and 20 bomb ships. As the floating batteries dropped anchor and commenced firing, the British guns thundered in reply. Early rounds from the floating batteries fell short, splashing into the water, but as their fire was corrected the sea walls and the town of Gibraltar took a terrific pounding. The lead floating battery, *Pastora*, was positioned directly opposite the King's Bastion, and *Tala Piedra* followed closely. The two ships, however, advanced dangerously ahead of the others. An exchange of shot inflicted heavy damage on the King's Bastion, although its rate of fire barely slackened.

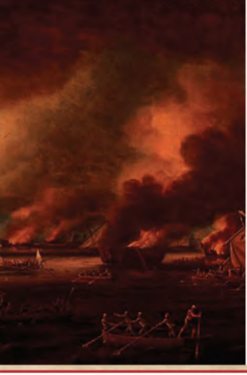
Hours of heavy cannonade ensued, but eventually the protective measures taken



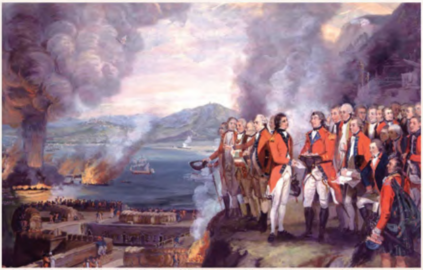
to safeguard the floating batteries against deadly flames began to fail. Fires were noted aboard *Pastora* around two in the afternoon, and soon smoke began billowing from *Tala Piedra*. Long labour in abhorrent conditions also took its toll on the French and Spanish gunners, and the rate of fire from the floating batteries began to falter. By 9pm they had ceased firing altogether. Several were blazing hulks, their crews frantically attempting to abandon ship before powder magazines detonated. It was too late for *Tala Piedra*, its magazine erupting in a violent explosion that sent a towering cloud of debris skyward. *Pastora* burned to the waterline, as all 10 floating batteries were eventually lost.

Captain Roger Curtis displayed conspicuous bravery during the desperate battle, leading British gunboats close to the Spanish warships and repeatedly peppering them with grapeshot that took a heavy toll. After the catastrophic explosion that destroyed *Tala Piedra*, Curtis's boats picked up 350 Spanish survivors.

The bombardment of Gibraltar from the landward side continued for some time, even after de Crillon called off the infantry advance. The French and Spanish suffered nearly 1,500 casualties, while the British lost just 15 killed and 68 wounded.



Artist Thomas Whitcombe captured the ferocity of the battle that resulted in the destruction of the French and Spanish floating batteries during the Great Siege of Gibraltar. Ten floating batteries were set alight and destroyed during the fight, and subsequently the entire grand assault against the defending British was called off.



Artist George Carter titled this painting *The Siege of Gibraltar, 1782*, and the scene presents General George Augustus Eliott conferring with a large group of officers on the cliffs of 'the Rock.' In the distance, the allied floating batteries burn brightly and explode during their failed assault of September 13.

The Final Relief

As allied forces were making final preparations for their grand assault, General Eliott realised that his food and ammunition supplies were again running perilously low. By September, however, the Admiralty had already authorised a large relief convoy, the third and final major effort of its kind. Under the command of Admiral Richard Howe, a convoy of 140 cargo ships escorted by 34 ships-of-the-line sailed from Spithead on September 11, 1782. Thirty-one of the cargo ships were meant for the relief of Gibraltar, while the 25th and 59th regiments of foot were aboard as reinforcements for the bastion.

Severe weather slowed the convoy's progress, but a month later lookouts spotted the towering rock on the horizon. High winds swept many of the cargo ships off course, and Royal Navy frigates spent several days rounding them up. Meanwhile, the Spanish and French warships off Gibraltar did not offer battle. After a week on station, Howe turned his command toward Britain and sailed away unmolested.

De Crillon concluded shortly thereafter that the strengthened British garrison and the successful Royal Navy resupply efforts had rendered his opportunity for victory at Gibraltar remote. From a peak of 65,000 men, Spanish and French troop strength was gradually reduced. The frequent artillery duels began to subside, and by late February the great siege had come to an end. Allied casualties during the siege topped 6,000, while British losses amounted to 338 killed as a result of fighting, 536 dead of disease, and 1,234 wounded or lost to related causes.

Eliott's steadfast command of a beleaguered force that appeared hopelessly outnumbered had turned probable defeat into a tremendous triumph.

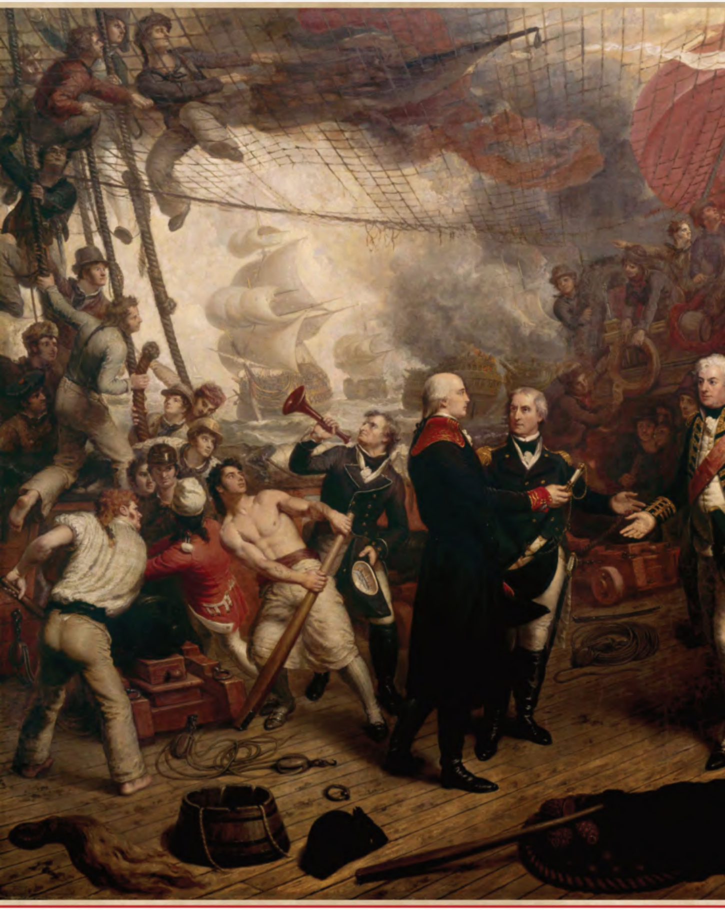
Implications of the Great Siege

After their defeat in Gibraltar, the French and Spanish were no longer able to seriously contemplate an invasion of Britain. Although opposing naval forces still posed a threat, the Royal Navy had asserted primacy at sea.

Despite the terms of the preliminary peace treaty with its former North American colonies, Britain's delegates to the Paris negotiations stiffened their position after receiving news of the outcome of the siege. While American independence was recognised and the vast Northwest Territory was to become part of the United States with the treaty signed on September 3, 1783, the British diplomats refused to cede lands north of the former Canadian boundary to the Americans; therefore, the United States extended no further north than the Great Lakes, solidifying the Canadian frontier. The Americans were further compelled to suspend seizures of property belonging to former loyalists and pay certain debts related to the war.

Subsequent peace negotiations were further favourable to Great Britain. The return of Gibraltar had been Spain's primary war aim, but the 'Rock' would not be relinquished. Instead, the Spanish received Minorca, some islands of the West Indies, and territory in Florida. Gibraltar has since remained in British hands for over 300 years and served as a vital strategic military base and source of great national pride.

France regained control of some territories in Africa, India, and North America that had been lost during the Seven Years' War; however, the nation emerged from the American Revolution heavily in debt. Economic uncertainty then became a key factor in the outbreak of the French Revolution only six years later.



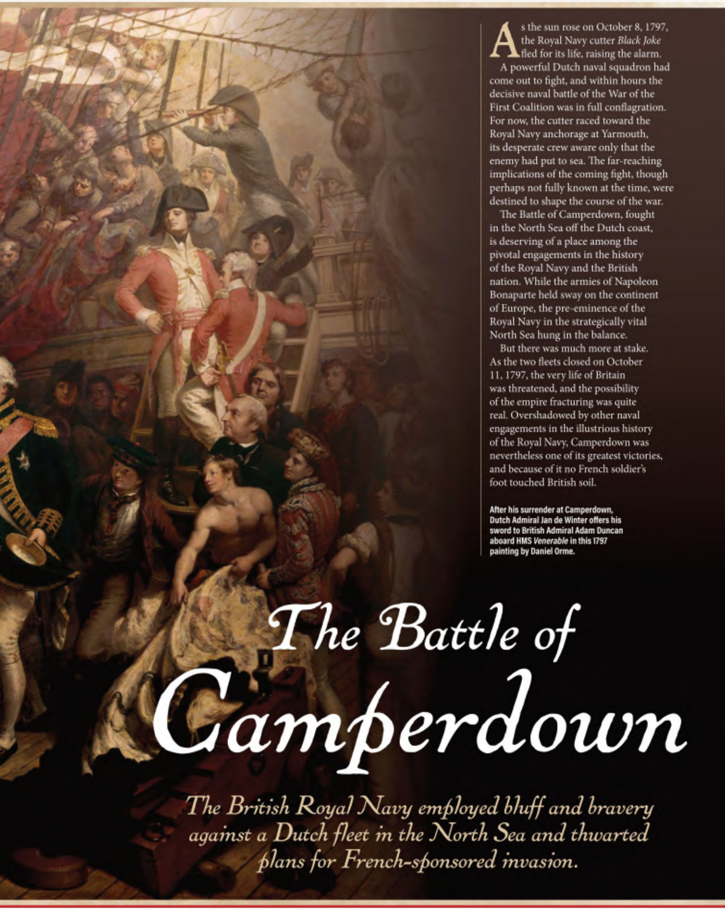
The Battle of Camperdown

The British Royal Navy employed bluff and bravery against a Dutch fleet in the North Sea and thwarted plans for French-sponsored invasion.

As the sun rose on October 8, 1797, the Royal Navy cutter *Black Joke* fled for its life, raising the alarm. A powerful Dutch naval squadron had come out to fight, and within hours the decisive naval battle of the War of the First Coalition was in full conflagration. For now, the cutter raced toward the Royal Navy anchorage at Yarmouth, its desperate crew aware only that the enemy had put to sea. The far-reaching implications of the coming fight, though perhaps not fully known at the time, were destined to shape the course of the war.

The Battle of Camperdown, fought in the North Sea off the Dutch coast, is deserving of a place among the pivotal engagements in the history of the Royal Navy and the British nation. While the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte held sway on the continent of Europe, the pre-eminence of the Royal Navy in the strategically vital North Sea hung in the balance.

But there was much more at stake. As the two fleets closed on October 11, 1797, the very life of Britain was threatened, and the possibility of the empire fracturing was quite real. Overshadowed by other naval engagements in the illustrious history of the Royal Navy, Camperdown was nevertheless one of its greatest victories, and because of it no French soldier's foot touched British soil.



After his surrender at Camperdown, Dutch Admiral Jan de Winter offers his sword to British Admiral Adam Duncan aboard HMS *Venerable* in this 1797 painting by Daniel Orme.

Rising Tide Toward Camperdown

By the autumn of 1797, revolutionary France had been at war with the forces of the First Coalition for four long years. Arrayed against it at times were up to six European powers, their governments seeking to stem the tide of revolutionary fervour as well as territorial gains while France was in turmoil.

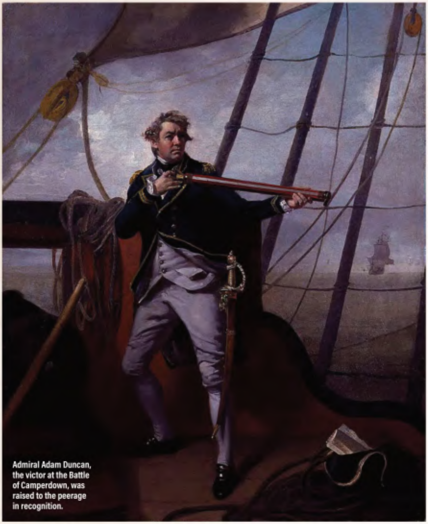
When King Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, went to the guillotine during the Reign of Terror in 1793, the crowned heads of Europe shuddered. Other ambitions gave way to a collective instinct of self-preservation. Spain, the Netherlands, Prussia, Austria, Naples, Sardinia, and a reluctant Great Britain were allied against France, which initially suffered numerous setbacks, including the loss of Belgium and internal uprisings.

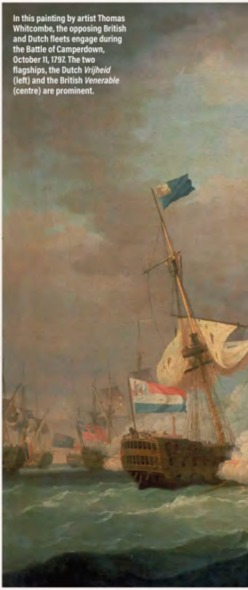
France, however, soon committed to total war. During one of the revolts, at Toulon, a previously obscure artillery captain, Napoleon Bonaparte, distinguished himself, beginning a mercurial rise to power.

By the end of 1793, a dramatic turnaround occurred. French troops occupied the Netherlands, renaming the country the Batavian Republic. Austria and Prussia each made a separate peace with France. By 1796, Spain was defeated and had become a French ally. Napoleon also won spectacular successes in Italy.

While the French dominated on land, the Royal Navy remained undefeated at sea. On June 1, 1794, Admiral Richard Howe earned a victory over the French Navy in the battle dubbed the Glorious First of June. On February 14, 1797, a British squadron under Admiral Sir John Jervis defeated a Spanish fleet in the Battle of Cape St. Vincent.

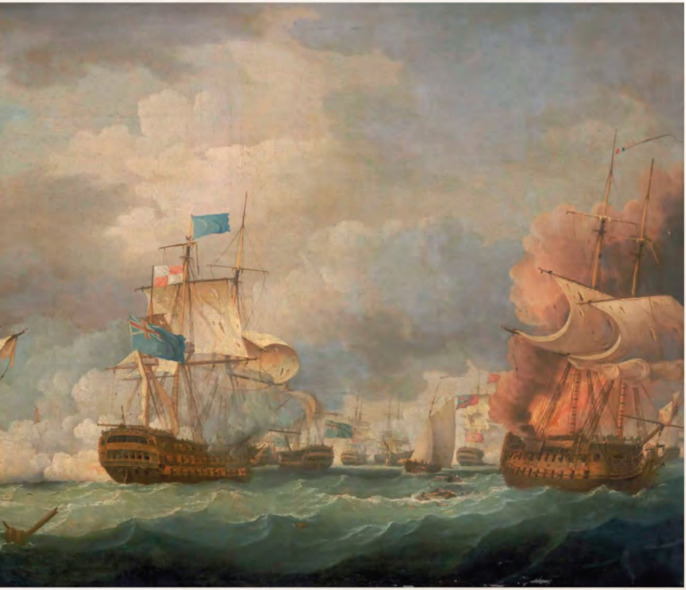
Far to the north, the stage was set for the most bitter naval battle of the War of the First Coalition. For several months, the British North Sea fleet, commanded by Scottish-born Admiral Adam Duncan, had been on station in the North Sea, blockading Dutch naval vessels at Den Helder and Texel and countering the French grand strategy of landing troops in Ireland to provide direct support to an uprising against British rule.


Admiral Adam Duncan, the victor at the Battle of Camperdown, was raised to the peerage in recognition.


In this painting by artist Thomas Whitcombe, the opposing British and Dutch fleets engage during the Battle of Camperdown, October 11, 1797. The two flagships, the Dutch *Vrijheid* (left) and the British *Venerable* (centre) are prominent.

The British were keenly aware of France's intent and knew that one attempt to land troops at Bantry Bay in County Cork had been turned back by severe weather the previous year. As the radical ideals of the French Revolution were embraced, Irish hatred of England gained momentum. Prominent among Irish revolutionaries was Theobald Wolfe Tone. At his urging, 43 ships sailed from the port of Brest on December 15, 1796 with 14,000 French troops under General Louis Lazare Hoche. However, the expedition encountered gale force winds and was forced back to Brest.

Tone blamed the fiasco on poor French seamanship and agitated for another invasion attempt with support of the Dutch fleet and troops landing at Edinburgh, Scotland. These soldiers would march cross-country to Glasgow, establishing a supply base for the invasion of Ireland. Hoche championed the



effort but died in September 1797, the plan perishing with him.

Although the British were aware of the French reversal, the Admiralty had other problems. In mid-April 1797, the crews of 16 Royal Navy vessels anchored at Spithead mutinied, protesting harsh conditions and low pay. Lord Howe mediated the crisis, reaching a settlement known as the 'Breeze at Spithead'.

Prior to Howe's intervention, several incidents of violence had occurred, and within days unrest at Spithead had spread to the Royal Navy anchorage at the Nore, in the Thames Estuary. On May 12, mutineers seized control of HMS *Sandwich*, a 90-gun ship-of-the-line converted to a floating battery. Led by Richard Parker, the mutiny at the Nore took on a different character. Among the demands was assurance that terms offered at Spithead would apply at the Nore, but a notable exception calling for the dissolution of Parliament and an immediate peace treaty with France carried tremendous political overtones.

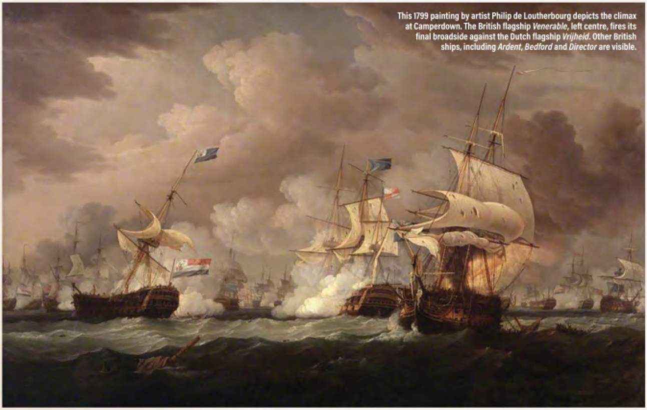
The mutinous fleet blockaded the Thames, and Parker attempted to sail his company to France. However, when the signal was raised, not a single vessel followed HMS *Sandwich*. The rebellion foundered, and Parker was hanged.

Twenty-nine conspirators at the Nore were executed. Others were flogged, sentenced to prison, or banished to Australia. Unrest aboard Royal Navy ships had placed Great Britain in peril. However, an embattled Admiralty proved pragmatic, meting out death sentences to a few and allowing many conspirators to escape punishment altogether.

Tone, well aware of the mutinies, urged that the time was ripe to carry out the invasion of Ireland, but the hour of opportunity passed. Hoche's death and the abandonment of the invasion plan were welcome news in Britain. By September, Duncan's squadron off the Texel, battered by heavy weather with provisions exhausted, was ordered to Yarmouth for refitting.

Watchful And Waiting

Duncan left a skeleton force off the Dutch coast to warn of any movement by the enemy squadron under the command of Admiral Jan Willem de Winter, who had arrived at the Texel in June. Under Captain Henry Trollope, the token British flotilla at times included as few as four ships, Trollope's 74-gun HMS *Russel*, the 50-gun frigate *Adamant*, and the cutters *Black Joke* and *Active*. Trollope employed several ruses, sending erroneous signals and appearing to respond to commands from other vessels to present the illusion that his force was considerably larger.


This 1799 painting by artist Philip de Loutherbourg depicts the climax at Camperdown. The British flagship *Venerable*, left centre, fires its final broadside against the Dutch flagship *Vrijheid*. Other British ships, including *Ardent*, *Bedford* and *Director* are visible.

THE VLIETER INCIDENT

During the War of the Second Coalition, 22 months after the decisive Royal Navy victory over the Dutch Fleet at Camperdown, Great Britain and Russia launched a joint invasion of the Batavian Republic, hoping to restore the Dutch monarchy and end the Batavian alliance with revolutionary France.

The Anglo-Russian land forces were put ashore on August 26, 1799 by a squadron of warships and transports, including 11 ships-of-the-line and seven frigates, under the command of Admiral Andrew Mitchell. The Helder squadron of the Dutch fleet, under the command of Admiral Samuel Story, approached from the Zuider Zee, and though Story might have resisted the incursion, support for William V, Prince of Orange, ran deep among his ships' crews. Mutinies broke out, and Story determined along with his senior officers that the circumstances precluded their ability to give battle.

The result was the surrender of the Helder squadron to Mitchell's force on August 30. The Anglo-Russian land campaign, however, failed, and the troops were withdrawn in October. The Batavian government subsequently embarked on a campaign of retribution against those who surrendered in the so-called Vlieter Incident, and though the land offensive came to naught, Story's bloodless capitulation further strengthened the Royal Navy grip on the North Sea. Orangist rule in the Netherlands was finally restored in 1814.

When de Winter arrived in the Texel, he expected the invasion to go forward; however, with its cancellation the Dutch ships languished in harbour. The Committee for Naval Affairs in The Hague nevertheless ordered de Winter to take the offensive in early autumn.

At sea on the morning of October 8, 1797 the Dutch spotted Trollope's tripwire and *Black Joke* made for Yarmouth to raise the alarm. Meanwhile, de Winter, following orders, retired toward the Texel. Although his ships were not fully replenished, Duncan feared Trollope might be annihilated or that the Dutch fleet was screening another French invasion force. On October 9, the balance of the British fleet set sail. Early on October 11, Duncan rendezvoused with Trollope.

The British and Dutch North Sea fleets were roughly equal in strength. Duncan's 24 ships included the 74-gun third-rate ships-of-the-line *Bedford*, *Triumph*, *Montagu*, *Russel*, *Powerful*, *Monarch*, and his flagship *Venerable*, the 64-gun *Lancaster*, *Belliqueux*, *Ardent*, *Monmouth*, *Director*, *Veteran*, and *Agincourt*, the frigates *Isis* and *Adamant*, each with 50 guns, *Beaulieu* with 40, and the smaller *Circe* with 28. The cutters *Martin*, *Rose*, *King George*, *Active*, and *Diligent* were also present.

Admiral de Winter's flag flew aboard 74-gun *Vrijheid*, while the Dutch fleet also included 76-gun *Staten Generaal*, *Jupiter*, and *Brutus* each with 74, *Cerberus*, *Gelijkheid*, *Haarlem*, *Leyden*, and *Tjerk Hiddes* with 68, the 64-gun *Hercules* and *Wassenaer*, the *Alkmaar*, *Batavier* and *Beschermer* with 56, the 54-gun *Delft*, the *Mars* and *Monnikendham* with 44, *Ambuscade* with 36, *Heldin* with 32, and *Minerva* and *Waakzamheid* at 24. These were supported by 18-gun brigs *Atalanta*, *Daphne*, *Ajax*, and *Galathe* and tiny *Het Haajse* with six cannon.

A Scotsman, Duncan was born in Dundee in 1731. He had joined the Royal Navy at age 15, attained the rank of rear admiral in 1783, and in 1795 was promoted commander-in-chief of the North Seas.

Admiral de Winter, age 37, served in the Dutch Navy until his political allegiance forced his flight to France. Later, he served with the French Army, rose to brigadier, and returned to the Netherlands in 1795. The following year, he re-entered naval service as vice admiral commanding the Dutch fleet.

When he discovered that the Dutch warships had not returned to their harbour, Duncan sailed south in search of the enemy. De Winter, meanwhile, was sailing north-northeast in a westerly wind.

A Fierce Brawl

On the morning of October 11, the two fleets sighted one another roughly 18 miles off the Dutch coast near the village of Camperdown. Apparently aware that his ships were of shallower draft than those of his enemy, de Winter attempted to lure the British into shoal waters to impede their manoeuvrability.

However, alert to the danger of the shallows, Duncan reacted quickly. He abandoned an attempt to form a line of battle to confront de Winter and made for the van of the Dutch fleet, while Vice Admiral Richard Onslow, aboard HMS *Monarch*, was ordered to break the Dutch line of battle near the rear. When one of Onslow's lookouts shouted that the Dutch ships were too close together, he responded: "The *Monarch* will make a passage!"

Monarch was the first to breach the Dutch line, slamming broadsides into *Haarlem* and *Jupiter* as she passed between them at about 12.30pm. HMS *Powerful*, close behind, took on *Haarlem* from the weather side, while *Monarch* became locked in close combat with *Jupiter* on the lee. The movement, however, exposed *Monarch* to the fire of *Monnikendham* and *Atalanta*, which blasted away gamely until forced to retire by the heavy guns of the British third-rate. *Monmouth* and *Russel* engaged *Alkmaar* and *Delft* at the end of the Dutch line, while the remainder of Onslow's group, *Beaulieu*, *Adamant*, *Veteran*, and *Montagu* followed into the melee.

Captain John Williamson held *Agincourt* out of the fray. Following the battle, Williamson faced court martial on a charge of failing to engage the enemy. Williamson's principal accuser had been Captain Thomas Hopper, commander of the Royal Marine contingent aboard *Agincourt*. Williamson was found guilty and cashiered from the navy.

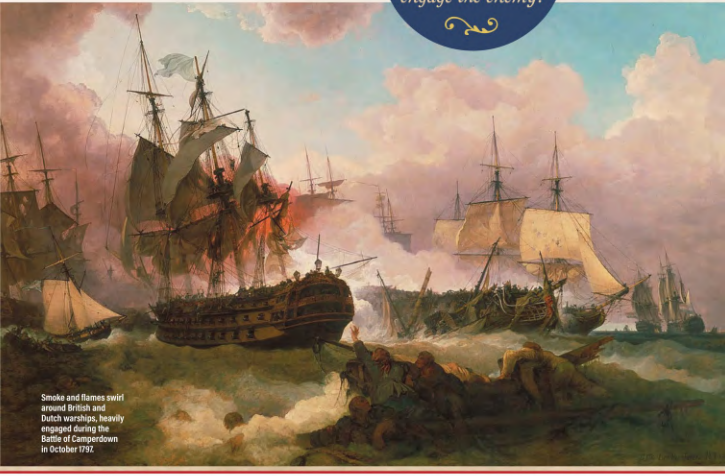
Although *Jupiter* had been the first Dutch ship to come under fire, the gallant 74-gun vessel was the last at the end of the Dutch line to strike its colours. *Hercules* caught fire, staggered out of line, and was forced to surrender. *Delft* was raked by broadsides from *Monmouth* and *Montagu*, dismasted, and surrendered.

Twenty minutes behind Onslow, Duncan attempted to breach the Dutch line astern of *Vrijheid*, but *Staten Generaal* closed the gap and forced *Venerable* to pass astern. *Venerable* slipped to the lee and came alongside *Vrijheid*. Flagship fought flagship, while *Ardent* pounded away at *Vrijheid* from the weather side. *Bedford* became the third British ship to hit *Vrijheid* while squeezing past the stern of *Gelijkheid*. *Triumph*, closely following *Venerable*, became entangled with *Wassenaer*. While *Venerable* was occupied with *Vrijheid*, the centre of the Dutch line remained relatively unengaged. *Brutus*, *Leyden*, and *Mars* sped to the aid of their overmatched flagship and poured fire into *Venerable*. Other ships of Duncan's group, particularly *Ardent*, were taken hard in the flank by the Dutch trio.

So damaged was *Venerable* that she was compelled to withdraw on the starboard tack. At the height of the battle, a portion of *Venerable's* mast was shot away, carrying with it Admiral Duncan's flag. The absence of the admiral's flag was an acknowledged signal of surrender but a 22-year-old seaman, Jack Crawford, was said to have taken up the ensign, climbed the remnant of the mast, and nailed the colours back in place, earning himself the nickname 'Hero of Camperdown' and providing the source of a familiar naval phrase 'to nail your colours to the mast'.

Triumph, having vanquished *Wassenaer*, joined *Ardent* and *Director* in pummelling *Vrijheid*. The Dutch flagship lost all three masts. Gallant but battered to a hulk, *Vrijheid* finally struck her colours. Curiously, when *Wassenaer* surrendered and fell out of the Dutch line of battle, one of the 18-gun Dutch brigs began firing at the disabled vessel until she raised her flag and resumed fighting. Seeing the Dutch flag hoisted again, HMS *Russel* proceeded to subdue *Wassenaer* for good.

Williamson faced court martial on a charge of failing to engage the enemy.



Smoke and flames swirl around British and Dutch warships, heavily engaged during the Battle of Camperdown in October 1797.

The surrender of *Vrijheid* brought an end to the close-quarter melee, and *Venerable* slipped out of dangerously shallow waters, only nine fathoms deep. Quickly, Duncan, Onslow, and the British captains assessed their situation. Eleven Dutch warships, *Vrijheid*, *Jupiter*, *Tjerk Hiddes*, *Gelijkheid*, *Haarlem*, *Hercules*, *Wassenaer*, *Alkmaar*, *Delft*, *Monnikendham*, and *Galathe*, had been taken as prizes.

The Terrible Toll

Dutch casualties included 540 killed and more than 600 wounded. Among the dead were the captains of *Vrijheid* and *Wassenaer*, while three Dutch admirals were wounded.

The defeated Admiral de Winter was taken prisoner and brought aboard *Venerable*. When he offered his sword to Duncan, the latter refused and shook his adversary's hand. Both Duncan and de Winter were men of considerable physical stature, over six feet tall, and de Winter remarked that it was miraculous that two men of such size should come through such a terrific battle unscathed. De Winter remained in British hands until December when he was exchanged.

For the British, it was apparent that they had fought a foe worthy of respect. More than 200 seamen were dead and over 800 wounded at Camperdown. Among those killed was the heroic Captain Richard Burgess of HMS *Ardent*.

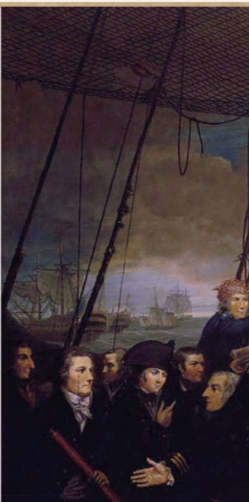
Although they were well aware that several Dutch ships were attempting to escape, the British were in no shape to pursue the defeated enemy. *Ardent* alone had suffered more than 100 hits. The battered British ships reached Yarmouth on October 18, but their prizes were so badly damaged that they were unfit for further service and broken up. *Delft* had sunk in heavy seas en route.

The Consequences of Camperdown

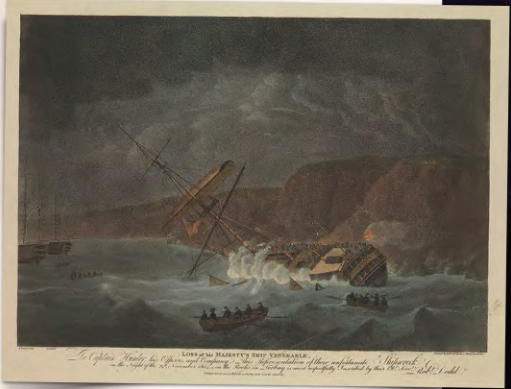
The prowess of the Royal Navy during the Coalition Wars is well documented, and its influence on the outcome has been examined thoroughly; however, the Battle of Camperdown, an engagement that yielded profound – potentially staggering – consequences has received relatively little comparative historical attention.

While Camperdown has lingered in the shadow of more famous Royal Navy victories, the stakes were perhaps never higher than on October 11, 1797. Intrigue and covert negotiations had hatched French-Irish schemes to invade the British Isles, sever Ireland from the fold of the empire, and perhaps even deliver Napoleon's arch adversary into the clutches of the ambitious conqueror.

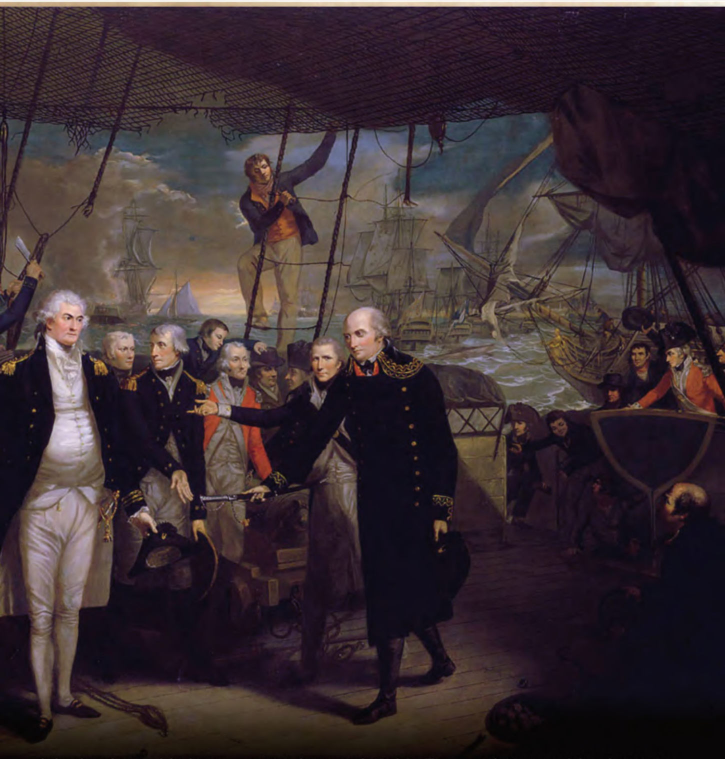
The victory over the Dutch fleet ended the threat of an actual invasion of Ireland, Scotland, and possibly even England itself by the French and supporting Irish rebels in 1797. It also postponed another French expedition to Ireland for nearly a year, when yet another attempt was thwarted again by



Artist Samuel Drummond painted this scene of Admiral Jan de Winter's surrender to Admiral Adam Duncan at Camperdown 30 years after the decisive North Sea battle.


LOSS of his MAJESTY'S SHIP VENERABLE.
To Captain Hunter, his Officers, and Company, — this Representation of their unfortunate Shipwreck on the Night of the 24th November 1804, on the Rocks in Torbay is most respectfully Inscribed by their Obt. Servt. Robt. Dodd

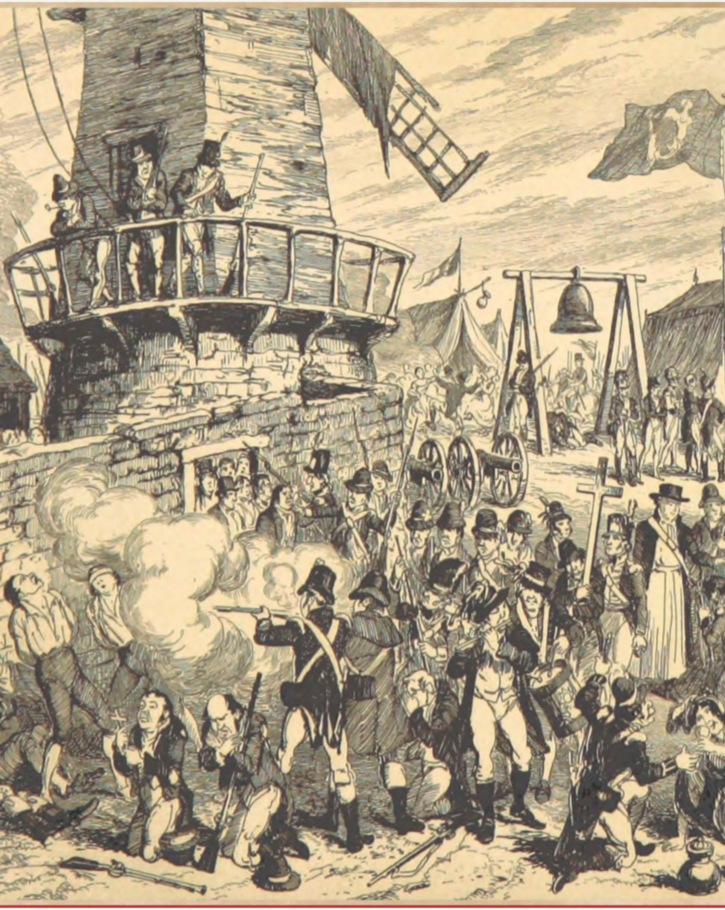
In this engraving by Robert Dodd, HMS *Venerable* is shipwrecked and lost on the rocks of Torbay on the night of 24 November 1804.



bad weather and waning rebel enthusiasm. Had the Dutch fleet won the Battle of Camperdown or inflicted such damage on Duncan's fleet that it could not recover, Irish dissidents and their French benefactors might well have realised their ambitions of invading both Scotland and Ireland.

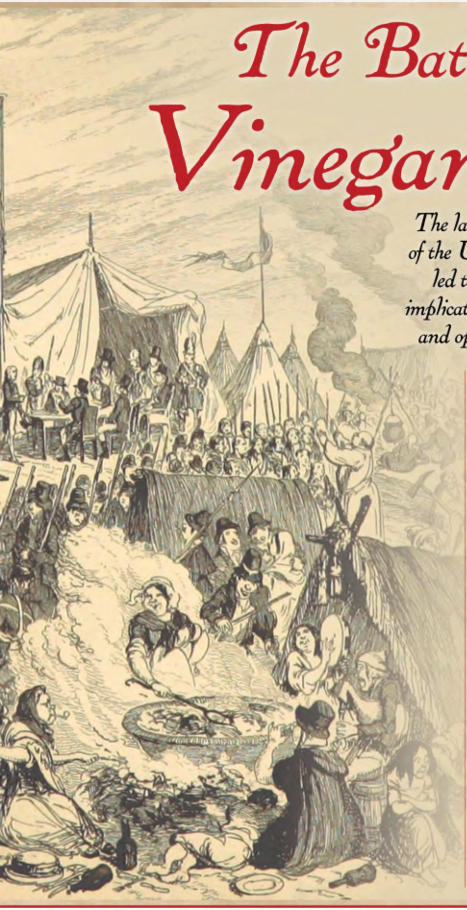
Camperdown further quelled an opportunity for Napoleon's allied fleet to break a stifling blockade as the Royal Navy remained supreme in the North Sea. The defeat gave pause to the governments of Scandinavian nations, which at the time were considering an alliance with revolutionary France. Negotiations were subsequently broken off. After the Dutch defeat at Camperdown, Napoleon, too, was likely to have shelved any designs he harboured for a direct invasion of England. At home, the Admiralty breathed a collective sigh of relief as the victory was a balm to the uncertainty in the wake of the recent mutinous activities.

Within a decade, Duncan's heroics at Camperdown were eclipsed by those of Admiral Horatio Nelson. Interestingly, Duncan's tactics employed off the Dutch coast at Camperdown may well have been adopted by Nelson to pierce the French line of battle at Trafalgar and win the most illustrious victory in British naval history.



The Battle of Vinegar Hill

The last major organised stand of the United Irishmen in 1798 led to a rout and long term implications for Irish nationalism and opposition to British rule.



It had come as a shock. The impertinent rebels who called themselves the United Irishmen had soundly beaten 100 soldiers of the North Cork Militia in County Wexford.

The news electrified the British government in Ireland at Dublin Castle. Although rebel forces in the counties surrounding Dublin – at Meath, Wicklow, Carlow, and Kildare – had been defeated, apparently diminishing the enthusiasm of the revolt, events at Oulart in County Wexford to the south had given renewed purpose to the rebels. With their focus closer to the seat of government, the authorities in Dublin had perhaps neglected County Wexford; however, the sting of defeat spurred them to further action.

The heavy-handed suppression of potential rebel influence had led to brutal treatment of the citizenry in Wexford, and rather than cowing the opposition, had perhaps contributed to the violence in an unexpected quarter. In the spring of 1798, the North Cork Militia had unleashed its wrath; rampaging indiscriminately, they murdered, tortured, laid waste to homes and farms, and put 34 captive United Irishmen to death in County Wicklow. Another 35 were condemned to the gallows at Carnew in County Wexford.

In response, the United Irishmen steeled themselves; women and children and other non-combatants were gripped with terror. Men who had previously avoided the conflict felt compelled to take up arms to protect their families and property. Wexford, then, became the flashpoint for the most significant battle of the Irish Rebellion of 1798.

In this illustration by artist George Cruikshank, the rebel camp at Vinegar Hill is depicted. Large numbers of women and children were present along with the fighters of the United Irishmen.

Beginnings of Rebellion

Although there had been turbulent times in Ireland for centuries, nearly a decade of renewed political unrest preceded the eruption of violence in 1798. Sweeping change in North America with the successful revolution of the 13 Colonies and the emergence of a republic in France had kindled new notions of independence in Ireland as well. Further, Irishmen were inspired by the writings of American political philosopher Thomas Paine, who, in his book *Rights of Man*, asserted that revolution is a just cause when a government does not safeguard the inherent rights of its citizens.

In the autumn of 1791, leaders of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches along with other factions met to find common ground and establish a structure to operate in a unified manner to reform the Irish parliament and bring self determination to their island. The Society of United Irishmen was established in Belfast, and its leaders looked to France for inspiration and tangible support. However, the British government saw such an association as tantamount to treason and had vigorously suppressed the United Irishmen by the spring of 1794, months after war had erupted between Britain and France.

The leaders of the United Irishmen continued to gather on a clandestine basis and remained dedicated to an independent Ireland with a republican form of government. During the suppression of the group, one of the Irish leaders, Theobald Wolfe Tone, fled for his life to America and then made his way to France with the idea of soliciting direct military support for the Irish cause. The French revolutionary government agreed to armed intervention.

The Edge of Invasion

In the Irish initiative, the French saw an opportunity to cripple their traditional rival, perhaps bringing Britain to its knees, or at the very least gaining significant concessions should victory be achieved.

France committed at least 10,000 troops and arms and equipment for another 20,000 to an invasion of Ireland. On December 16, 1796, the French fleet sailed. Eluding the Royal Navy, the invasion flotilla arrived at Bantry Bay, off the southwest coast of Ireland, six days later. Just at the critical time, foul weather thwarted the attempt to land the army, and the ships turned back to France. Within months, word had circulated widely that a revolutionary army was being raised in Ireland itself, heightening concerns in London. Meanwhile, a Royal Navy fleet defeated a Dutch naval squadron at the Battle of Camperdown in October 1797, frustrating French, and Irish plans for yet another invasion attempt.

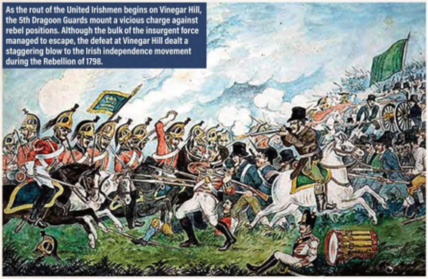
All the while, the British government at Dublin Castle had been intent on the destruction of the United Irishmen, infiltrating its ranks with spies to gather intelligence, jailing its leaders, and acquiescing to brutal repression of the populace in areas thought to be sympathetic to the independence movement. As the threat of French invasion seemed to ebb, it appeared as though the uprising of the United Irishmen might well be defeated before it had begun.

A Revolutionary Spark

The leaders of the movement, however, would not be denied their moment. Word was passed throughout the revolutionary cells that the long awaited uprising would begin on May 23, 1798, with the seizure of the overnight mail coaches departing the Dublin General Post Office for Cork, Limerick, Athlone, and Belfast. To improve coordination of the hijackings, the hour of the 'rising of the moon' was chosen.

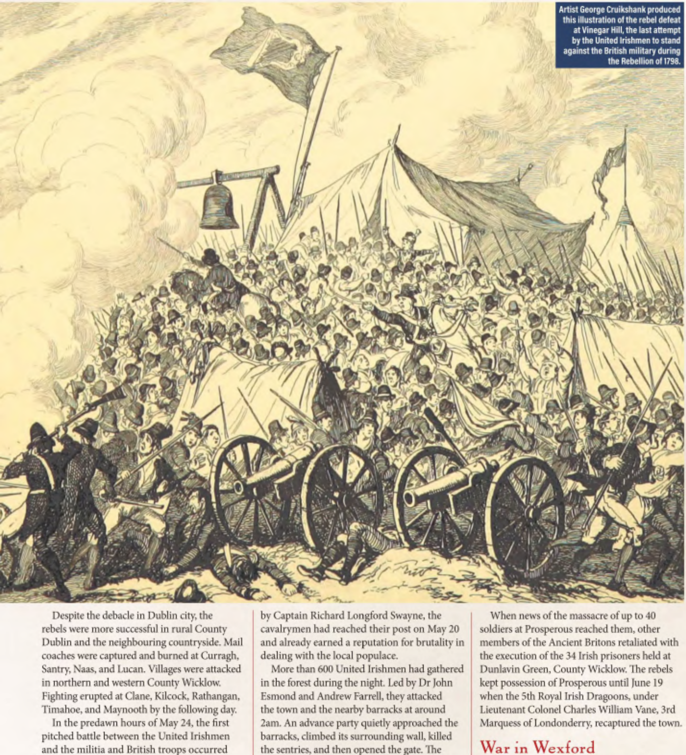
When the time came, the centre of activity was to occur in Dublin, where rebels would rise up – primarily from the poor districts of the city – and capture key buildings, including Dublin Castle, the seat of British rule in Ireland. In the event, however, the authorities had made pre-emptive moves to quell the rebellion. Utilising the information gleaned from their infiltrators, they ordered the arrests of several key leaders of the United Irishmen, mobilised the militia to move against the gathering places of the rebels, and dispersed the small crowds. In short order, the rebellion in Dublin fizzled.

The French saw an opportunity to cripple their traditional rival.



As the rout of the United Irishmen begins on Vinegar Hill, the 5th Dragoon Guards mount a vicious charge against rebel positions. Although the bulk of the insurgent force managed to escape, the defeat at Vinegar Hill dealt a staggering blow to the Irish independence movement during the Rebellion of 1798.

Nevertheless, the capital city was placed under martial law. The guard surrounding key buildings was tripled. Robert Jocelyn, 2nd Earl of Roden and his regiment of dragoons nicknamed the 'Foxhunters' savaged the rebels who resisted, killing and capturing a number of them. The bodies of the dead insurgents were put on display at daylight in the yard of Dublin Castle, and those taken prisoner were summarily hanged at Carlisle bridge.



Artist George Cruikshank produced this illustration of the rebel defeat at Vinegar Hill, the last attempt by the United Irishmen to stand against the British military during the Rebellion of 1798.

Despite the debacle in Dublin city, the rebels were more successful in rural County Dublin and the neighbouring countryside. Mail coaches were captured and burned at Curragh, Santry, Naas, and Lucan. Villages were attacked in northern and western County Wicklow. Fighting erupted at Clane, Kilcock, Rathangan, Timahoe, and Maynooth by the following day.

In the predawn hours of May 24, the first pitched battle between the United Irishmen and the militia and British troops occurred at Prosperous, County Kildare. The small garrison at Prosperous included 35 City of Cork militiamen and 22 soldiers of the Welsh cavalry regiment known as the 'Ancient Britons'. The Ancient Britons had been founded in 1794 by Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, 5th Baronet, and the regiment was to gain fame, or infamy, depending on perspective, during the conflict. Commanded by Captain Richard Longford Swayne, the cavalrymen had reached their post on May 20 and already earned a reputation for brutality in dealing with the local populace.

More than 600 United Irishmen had gathered in the forest during the night. Led by Dr John Esmond and Andrew Farrell, they attacked the town and the nearby barracks at around 2am. An advance party quietly approached the barracks, climbed its surrounding wall, killed the sentries, and then opened the gate. The ensuing commotion aroused Captain Swayne in his quarters; he was stabbed with a pike and shot to death where he stood, his body then stuffed into a tar barrel and set ablaze, the acrid smoke billowing across the landscape. Torches were tossed into the windows of buildings, and the barracks was set ablaze. Amid the chaos, those who attempted to escape were piked or shot dead in the open.

When news of the massacre of up to 40 soldiers at Prosperous reached them, other members of the Ancient Britons retaliated with the execution of the 34 Irish prisoners held at Dunlavin Green, County Wicklow. The rebels kept possession of Prosperous until June 19 when the 5th Royal Irish Dragoons, under Lieutenant Colonel Charles William Vane, 3rd Marquess of Londonderry, recaptured the town.

War in Wexford

Despite the unrest at Prosperous, it was apparently the unexpected victory of the United Irishmen at Oulart, County Wexford, that was most disturbing to the British authorities. In the south, Father John Murphy, already at odds with his bishop over support for the uprising, assumed command of a rebel force as it moved inexorably across the countryside toward Enniscorthy at the end of May. Although he was reluctant to lead the armed force against the British, Murphy felt compelled to defend his parishioners against the brutal excesses of the militia and British soldiers. Murphy had been an advocate for peace, encouraging the people to turn over their weapons to the local yeomanry and militia. However, the action had only invited further excesses against the citizenry.

As Murphy and the rebels approached the town, they stampeded a herd of cattle through its streets and followed the startled animals toward their objective. By this point the rebel strength had risen to around 15,000 and although many were only armed with pikes, the defenders were quickly overcome. The next day, the rebels set their sights on Wexford town. They decimated the approaching column of militia and marched into the abandoned city.

High Water Mark at Wexford

The defeat of the militia force and occupation of Wexford constituted the high water mark of the rebellion in southeastern Ireland. Soon after their triumph, the United Irishmen and their supporters were soundly defeated in a series of short, sharp battles at New Ross, Arklow, and Newtonbarry. Outmanoeuvred, the rebels suffered hundreds of killed and wounded in the fighting.

Elsewhere, the story of the rebellion was one of a swiftly extinguishing spark. In the north, few men responded to the rallying cry in County Derry, and there was virtually no fighting. The Ulster Provincial Council of the United Irishmen met on May 29 as the expected groundswell of support for the armed uprising had not materialised, and the entire leadership of the council was removed. Rebels led by Henry Joy McCracken did launch attacks across County Antrim, capturing the market house in Ballymena and swarming into Antrim town, where they took control for a few hours. The arrival of loyalist artillery turned the tables. The big guns inflicted heavy casualties on the rebels, who retreated in disorder, and some slipped away to their homes. McCracken was later captured and hanged.

Just as the revolt in County Antrim ebbed, the United Irishmen in nearby County Down roused anti-British sentiment on June 10, which came to be known as 'Pike Sunday'. Henry Monro, a Newtownards shopkeeper, led the rebels against government forces at Ballynahinch, 12 miles outside Belfast, in mid-June. The rebels were soundly defeated, suffering hundreds of casualties, while the British and militia forces suffered only three dead and 30 wounded. The rebellion in the north ended abruptly amid the spectacle of Monro's capture and execution. He was hanged outside his own front door.

Thus, the most troublesome enclave of rebellion remained in County Wexford, where the remnants of the rebel force had concentrated at Vinegar Hill in Enniscorthy.

THE DEMISE OF TONE

Theobald Wolfe Tone was a diehard Irish nationalist. His efforts to gain French support for the independence movement were relentless and following the defeat of September 1798 he remained committed.

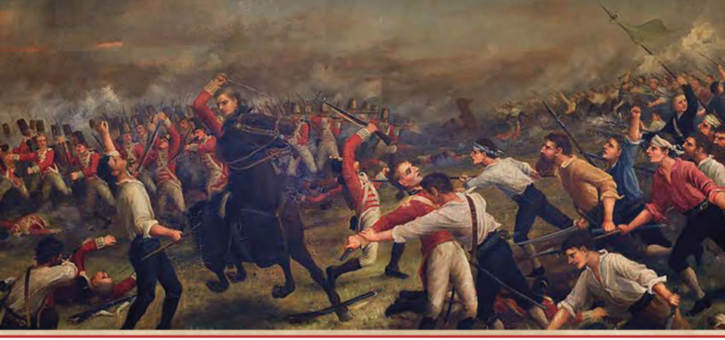
On October 12, 1798, a French force of 3,000 troops attempted to land on Irish soil at County Donegal near Lough Swilly. Elements of the Royal Navy intervened, and after a battle that lasted three hours the French surrendered. Tone was captured, tried, and convicted of treason in Dublin. Condemned to death, his request for a firing squad was denied. But Tone was to have the last say in his own demise. The hangman's noose awaited, but the revolutionary avoided such an ignominious death by slicing deep into his own throat. He lingered for a week and died on November 19.

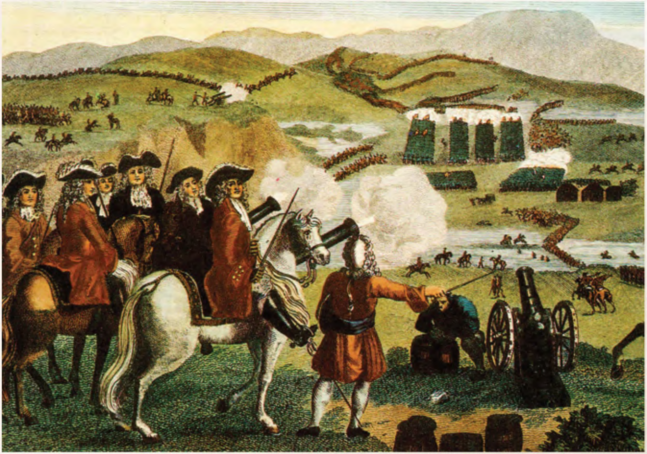
The Decisive Engagement

After their disastrous string of defeats, rebel leaders in the south brought nearly 20,000 men together at Vinegar Hill, along with hundreds of women and children. The fighters were ill equipped for the reckoning that was sure to come; however, they were resolute. By June 21, approximately 20,000 British troops and militiamen under General Gerard Lake had moved into position.

Lake divided his command into four columns in the hope of surrounding the rebels, and the action started before sunrise as his artillery began to pound positions on Vinegar

British troops and Irish rebels clash at Oulart in late May 1798. The victory of rebels under Father Murphy in County Wexford gave new life, albeit briefly, to the flame of Irish independence.





General Gerard Lake watches as soldiers of the United Irishmen are routed from their positions during the Battle of Vinegar Hill, June 21, 1798. The British victory at Vinegar Hill led to the suppression of the rebellion of 1798. (Alamy Images)

Hill. As the artillery took its toll, Lake's troops moved closer. In response, the United Irishmen charged the tightening ring twice, only to be repulsed. Fighting also took place in the streets of the town as light infantry attacked the fortified rebel positions. The first assault was repulsed, but a renewed effort supported by cavalry inexorably forced the rebels out of their works, and they fell back to defend the bridge over the River Slaney, the best avenue of escape.

Insurgent leader Miles Byrne was displeased with the defensive posture and believed the battle unfolded unfavourably because of it. Perhaps he was correct in advocating an attack against Lake's approaching force, particularly by the large number of rebels in Enniscorthy. On the day of battle, however, the rebels took heavy losses from the British artillery fire, which employed experimental shells that sprayed fragments in all directions, increasing the number of casualties.

At last, the British reached the summit of Vinegar Hill from the east, and the rebel defences broke. Although many rebels made good their escape, withdrawing through a gap in the attackers' line, their withdrawal became a rout. British infantry and cavalry closed in, slashing and bayoneting as they came. Artillery fired grape shot into the rebel masses, killing dozens, their mangled bodies mute testimony to the ferocity of the battle. In two hours, the last major organised stand of the United Irishmen against the British military during the rebellion was over. The rebels had lost up to 1,200 dead and wounded, while British casualties totalled 100.

In the wake of the battle, numerous atrocities were reported. After 100 loyalists had been slaughtered in a barn at New Ross, the British stabbed 70 prisoners taken at Vinegar Hill with pikes on the Wexford bridge. Rape, looting, and murder were the order of the day. Rebel leaders were taken prisoner and swiftly executed.

Father Murphy was captured a month after the Battle of Vinegar Hill. He was stripped of his clothing, flogged, and hanged, his body burned in a tar barrel in front of a Catholic church and his head displayed on a spike. The British required that the Catholics residing nearby open their windows so that the smell of the burning corpse permeated their homes.

Consequences of Vinegar Hill

Any real hope for an independent Ireland had hinged upon French military support, but the anticipated arrival of French soldiers did not occur until late August, two months after the defeat of the United Irishmen at Vinegar Hill. By that time the rebels had suffered further losses and their ranks were severely depleted.

Nevertheless, about 1,000 French troops and 5,000 rebels won a victory at Castlebar, which led to the establishment of a short-lived Irish Republic. However, it lasted only 12 days, dying after the defeat of the invaders at Ballinamick, County Longford. French prisoners were repatriated, but rebels were executed in large numbers.

The Battle of Vinegar Hill effectively sealed the fate of the Irish independence movement of the late 18th century. Cohesive relationships between the Irish factions were fractured, and subsequent generations would become embroiled in sectarian violence, a latent republican separatist movement, and continuing cruelty and reprisal that persisted into modern times.

Britain took advantage of the destabilised situation to dissolve the Irish parliament as a separate body, bringing Ireland and England closer together. The Act of Union of 1801 created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Still, the memory of the bloody rebellion remains in Irish lore, memorialised in writing, song, and story – both as an inspiration and a latent warning of the brutality of which men are capable.

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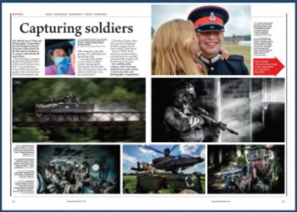

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STANDING TALL

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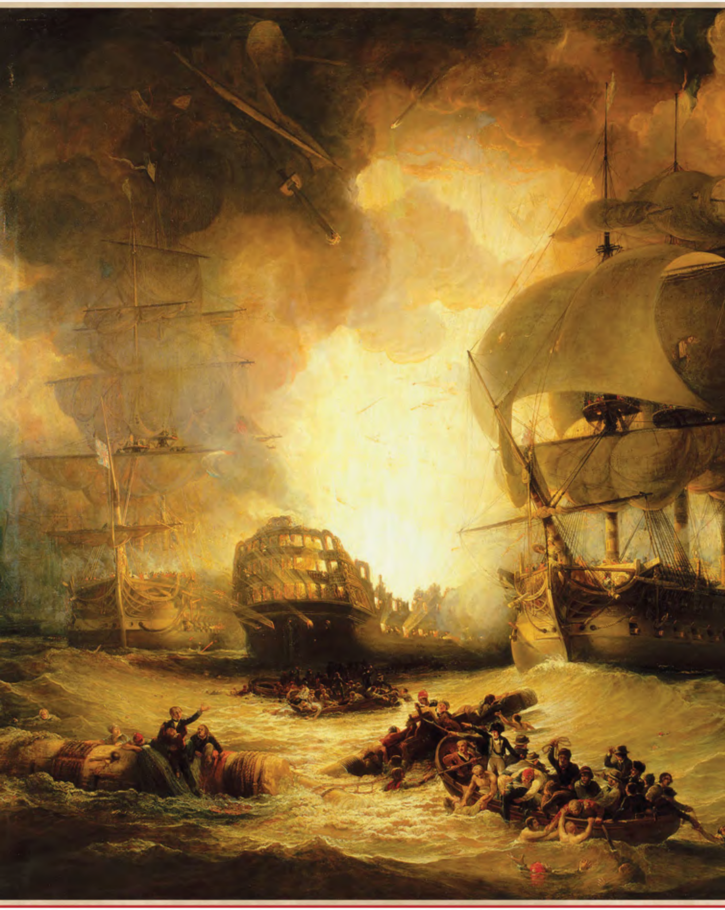


The Battle of The Nile

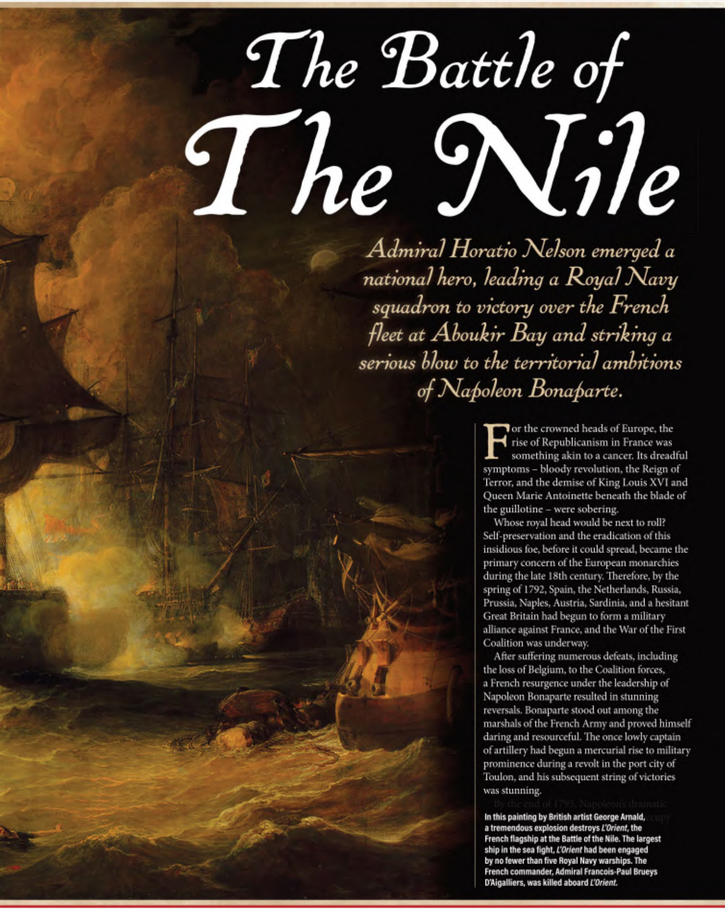
Admiral Horatio Nelson emerged a national hero, leading a Royal Navy squadron to victory over the French fleet at Aboukir Bay and striking a serious blow to the territorial ambitions of Napoleon Bonaparte.

For the crowned heads of Europe, the rise of Republicanism in France was something akin to a cancer. Its dreadful symptoms – bloody revolution, the Reign of Terror, and the demise of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette beneath the blade of the guillotine – were sobering.

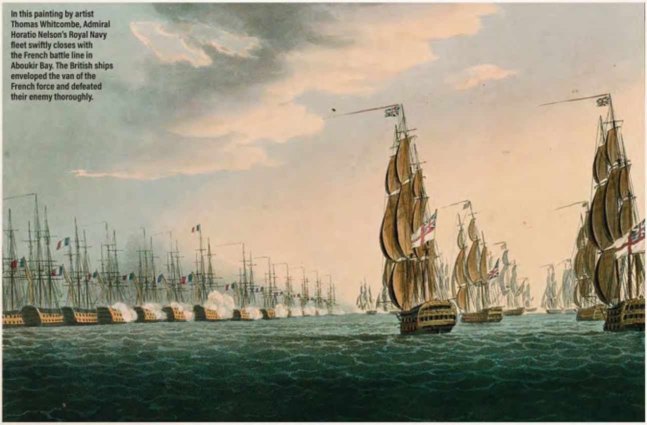
Whose royal head would be next to roll? Self-preservation and the eradication of this insidious foe, before it could spread, became the primary concern of the European monarchies during the late 18th century. Therefore, by the spring of 1792, Spain, the Netherlands, Russia, Prussia, Naples, Austria, Sardinia, and a hesitant Great Britain had begun to form a military alliance against France, and the War of the First Coalition was underway.

After suffering numerous defeats, including the loss of Belgium, to the Coalition forces, a French resurgence under the leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte resulted in stunning reversals. Bonaparte stood out among the marshals of the French Army and proved himself daring and resourceful. The once lowly captain of artillery had begun a mercurial rise to military prominence during a revolt in the port city of Toulon, and his subsequent string of victories was stunning.

By the end of 1793, Napoleon's dramatic



In this painting by British artist George Arnald, a tremendous explosion destroys *L'Orient*, the French flagship at the Battle of the Nile. The largest ship in the sea fight, *L'Orient* had been engaged by no fewer than five Royal Navy warships. The French commander, Admiral Francois-Paul Brueys D'Aigalliers, was killed aboard *L'Orient*.



In this painting by artist Thomas Whitcombe, Admiral Horatio Nelson's Royal Navy fleet swiftly closes with the French battle line in Aboukir Bay. The British ships enveloped the van of the French force and defeated their enemy thoroughly.

the Netherlands. The Austrians and Prussians were defeated at Wattignies and Weissenbourg, each eventually making a separate peace with France. In 1796, Spain had also been defeated and had become an ally of the French. Napoleon had further won spectacular successes during an invasion of Italy. In late 1797, the First Coalition had collapsed, and only Britain remained fighting France in the field and on the high seas.

The Royal Navy had held the line with its victories of the Glorious First of June in 1794 and the Battle of Cape St. Vincent in 1797. Therefore, while he sought to extend French hegemony on the European continent, Napoleon maintained a grudging respect for the Royal Navy's prowess.

Such respect was well founded and, indeed, validated in August 1798, when a Royal Navy fleet under Admiral Horatio Nelson thoroughly defeated the French naval squadron commanded by Admiral Francois-Paul Brueys D'Aigalliers in the Battle of the Nile, also called the Battle of Aboukir Bay.

At first glance, it might seem odd that the pivotal naval battle of the early French Revolutionary Wars should occur at the Rosetta mouth of the great River Nile in shallow Aboukir Bay, 15 miles east of the Egyptian port of Alexandria. However, the encounter occurred as Bonaparte undertook a military campaign in Egypt.

Victory in this far-off land would establish France in the eastern Mediterranean, threatening British trade routes from the Middle East and India, the jewel in the crown of the British Empire and a key component of its economic prosperity. French influence might extend to India itself, while favourable events would possibly dissuade the Ottoman Empire from concluding a military alliance with Britain and compel the traditional enemy of France to seek peace.

Nelson's victory of August 1, 1798 at Aboukir Bay doomed Napoleon's ambitious Egyptian foray to failure and fostered Royal Navy mastery of the Mediterranean Basin. Nelson became a national hero and later perhaps the most famous officer in the history of the Royal Navy. However, the issue was in doubt for some time as a game of cat and mouse was conducted across the Mediterranean.

Military and Political Ambition

The French Revolution had led first to the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, and the formation of the Republic occurred in September 1792. Three years later, a commission known as the Directory held the reins of government with the First Republic. The end of the War of the First Coalition in October 1797 did not quell Napoleon's desire for continuing conquest, and the Directory shared a willingness to extend the territory of France. Britain did not acquiesce as the other Coalition nations had done, remaining at war.

As much as Napoleon had enabled the First Republic to survive, actually crushing an attempted coup d'état, the Directory was wary of the general's ambitions and acknowledged privately that he might well attempt to seize power himself. Napoleon was prone to independent action, and his influence in government was profound.

In December 1797, Napoleon returned to Paris from his victorious campaign in Italy and discovered that the Directory had made plans for an invasion of Britain, expecting their favoured general to lead the venture with an army of 120,000 troops. Napoleon rejected the idea out of hand. An invasion of the British Isles was impossible without control of the English Channel, and the prohibitive cost would be more than the near-empty French treasury could bear.

In response, the Directory pragmatically resolved that it would accede to whatever Bonaparte proposed as his next military move. Elections were looming, and the Directors wanted their political rival as far from the French homeland as possible. Perhaps Napoleon would win great victories somewhere, but at least he would be in no position to threaten an overthrow of the government.

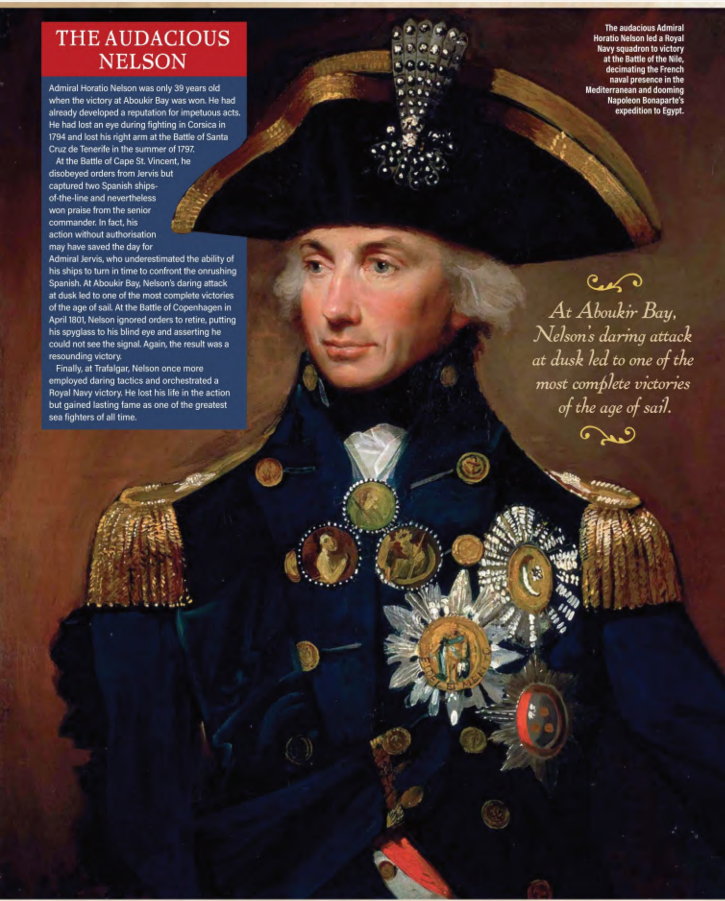
Napoleon proposed three strategic options. France might undertake peace negotiations

THE AUDACIOUS NELSON

Admiral Horatio Nelson was only 39 years old when the victory at Aboukir Bay was won. He had already developed a reputation for impetuous acts. He had lost an eye during fighting in Corsica in 1794 and lost his right arm at the Battle of Santa Cruz de Tenerife in the summer of 1797.

At the Battle of Cape St. Vincent, he disobeyed orders from Jervis but captured two Spanish ships-of-the-line and nevertheless won praise from the senior commander. In fact, his action without authorisation may have saved the day for Admiral Jervis, who underestimated the ability of his ships to turn in time to confront the onrushing Spanish. At Aboukir Bay, Nelson's daring attack at dusk led to one of the most complete victories of the age of sail. At the Battle of Copenhagen in April 1801, Nelson ignored orders to retire, putting his spyglass to his blind eye and asserting he could not see the signal. Again, the result was a resounding victory.

Finally, at Trafalgar, Nelson once more employed daring tactics and orchestrated a Royal Navy victory. He lost his life in the action but gained lasting fame as one of the greatest sea fighters of all time.



The audacious Admiral Horatio Nelson led a Royal Navy squadron to victory at the Battle of the Nile, decimating the French naval presence in the Mediterranean and dooming Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt.

> *At Aboukir Bay, Nelson's daring attack at dusk led to one of the most complete victories of the age of sail.*

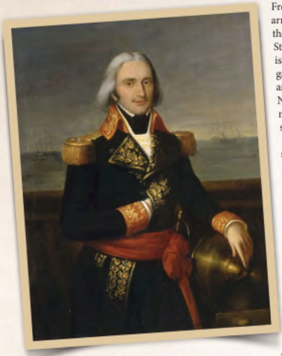
with Britain; launch a land campaign against Germanic Hanover, a land which Britain's King George III also ruled; or venture east to Egypt, where victory might prompt Britain to sue for peace for economic reasons alone. The Directory endorsed the expedition to Egypt.

Across the Mediterranean

Napoleon assembled a seaborne force of more than 37,000 troops and 100 artillery pieces along with provisions for an extended sea and land campaign. On May 19, 1798, the French embarked from five Mediterranean ports, Toulon, Marseilles, Ajaccio, Civita Vechia, and Genoa.

Although it was clear to the British that an offensive was underway, its objective was unclear. The French might attempt landings in Ireland, where a rebellion was underway, or even England itself. More likely, however, was a thrust across the Mediterranean.

Even before the French departure, the British Admiralty took steps to determine their course and respond militarily. Admiral John Jervis, Earl St. Vincent, commander of the Royal Navy fleet in the Mediterranean, was instructed to act accordingly from its anchorage in the Tagus. St. Vincent's second-in-command, Rear Admiral Horatio Nelson, was dispatched with a small squadron of three ships-of-the-line and three frigates to locate the French expeditionary force. Aboard his flagship HMS *Vanguard* Nelson departed the Tagus on May 9.



French Admiral Francois-Paul Brueys D'Aigalliers lost both legs and died amid the terrific explosion that sank his flagship, the 120-gun ship-of-the-line *L'Orient*, during the Battle of the Nile.

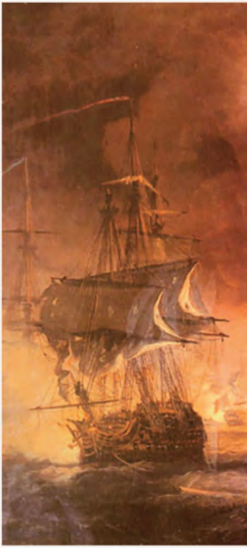
Ten days later, a fierce storm raged across the Mediterranean, seriously damaging *Vanguard* as the British squadron approached Toulon. Other ships were damaged, and the frigates blown well off course, reaching safety at Gibraltar. The frigates never rejoined Nelson's command. While *Vanguard* underwent hasty repairs at a Sicilian port, the French fleet set sail. Jervis, meanwhile, sent 10 more warships to Nelson, strengthening his force to a dozen 74-gun ships-of-the-line and one 50-gun fourth-rate warship.

> *Successfully eluding detection, the French sailed first for the island of Malta.*

Nelson was alerted that the French had sailed but had no idea where the enemy was headed. His reinforcements arrived on June 7, and the admiral put to sea again. He soon found Toulon empty of French ships, intuitively concluding that the enemy was headed across the Mediterranean to Egypt. Nelson had embarked with one significant handicap; his frigates were the eyes and ears of the fleet. Without them, his ability to scour the ocean for the enemy was quite limited.

Successfully eluding detection, the French sailed first for the island of Malta, arriving on June 9 and landing troops that subdued the defending Knights of St. John in four days. After looting the island's treasure stores, Napoleon left a garrison of 4,000 troops to hold Malta and departed for Egypt on June 19 as Nelson tried to glean information from neutral ships that plied the sea and searched in vain for the French.

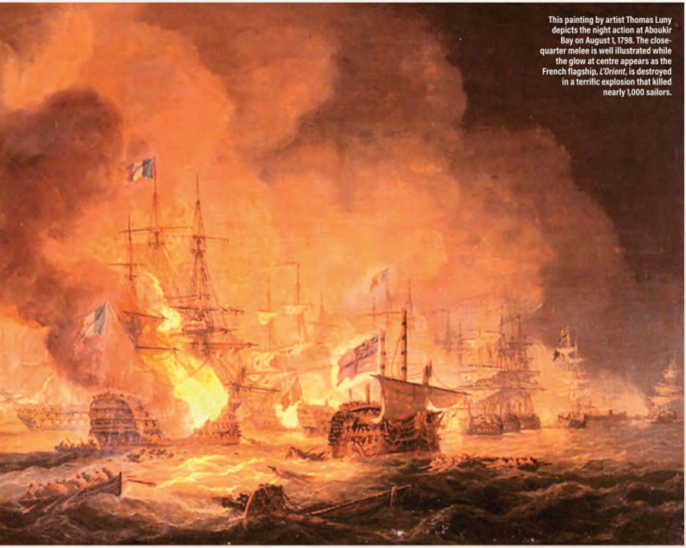
On the night of June 22, French sailors reported the sounds of strange bells and signal guns, but French commanders discounted the possibility of a substantial British naval presence in the Mediterranean and sailed on. Quite probably, the two fleets passed one another in the darkness, without exchanging a shot. As both had proceeded toward Alexandria and the Egyptian coast, Nelson took a more direct route, while the French sailed out of the north, from the vicinity of Crete. The result was that Nelson's squadron overtook the French, whose progress was slowed by their ponderous troop-carrying transports, and reached Egypt first.



On June 29 Nelson approached Alexandria, only to find the harbour empty of French ships. Napoleon was a day behind, but Nelson had no way of knowing. Sailing east, he searched the coastline further, then turned north toward Crete, and made port at Syracuse in southeastern Sicily. At the end of July, Nelson at last received reliable information on the whereabouts of the French. Departing once again for Alexandria, the British reached the Egyptian coast on August 1 and finally sighted the French fleet of 13 ships-of-the-line, nine with 74 guns, three with 80, four frigates, and Admiral Brueys' massive flagship, *L'Orient*, with 120 guns.

While the French army made landfall in Egypt, the harbour of Alexandria teemed with warships and 200 transport craft. Due to the limited space, Brueys was compelled to remove his fleet to Aboukir Bay, where shallow waters and treacherous shoals stretched in a crescent, protecting his flanks, while artillery batteries were detailed to nearby Aboukir Island.

Although technically sound, Brueys' defence concept was poorly executed. He formed a battle line as near to the shoals as possible to



This painting by artist Thomas Luny depicts the night action at Aboukir Bay on August 1, 1798. The close-quarter melee is well illustrated while the glow at centre appears as the French flagship, *L'Orient*, is destroyed in a terrific explosion that killed nearly 1,000 sailors.

deter a potential attack from the landward side. He arrayed his warships with *L'Orient* at the centre and the heavier vessels toward its southern end. Further orders went out to lash cables between the ships to prevent the enemy from sailing through the line, but these orders were not fully implemented. Other mistakes were made. In forming their line, the French ships were too widely separated, and the lead ship, *Guerrier*, did not anchor close enough to the shoal. The admiral personally committed another serious error, failing to deploy his four frigates as scouts to provide early warning if a British battle squadron approached.

Compounding the weakness in the French defences, many of the sailors were on shore digging wells for fresh water, and a general fatigue from months at sea had eroded combat efficiency. In addition, only the starboard sides of the French ships were prepared for battle. The portside gun ports were closed, and the decks there were cluttered with supplies and materials used for maintenance and upkeep. Brueys, in short, was ill prepared for battle, particularly with an audacious foe such as Nelson.

French lookouts sighted the British fleet at roughly 2pm on August 1, but Brueys did nothing to strengthen his position as four precious hours slipped away. Although several of his lieutenants suggested hoisting sail to meet the British in the open sea, Brueys demurred, believing that Nelson would not mount a serious attack so late in the day. His miscalculation proved fatal. Nelson had previously conferred with his captains, and each knew generally the method of pressing a coordinated advantage while retaining individual initiative in battle.

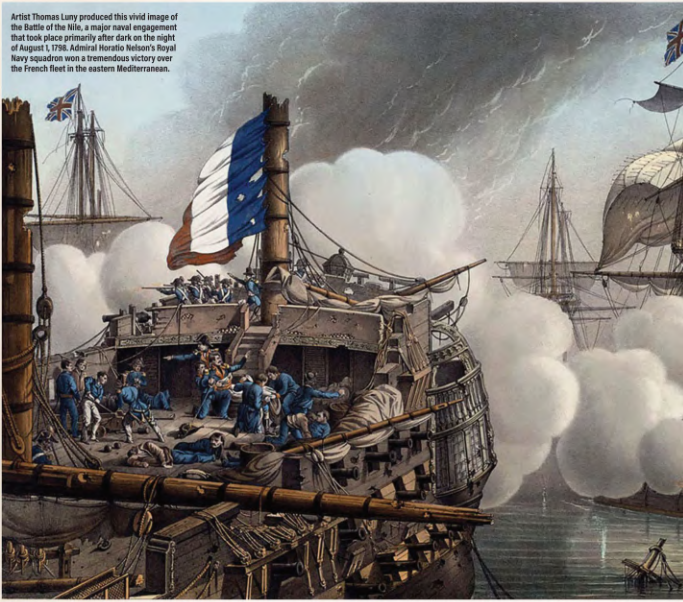
The Battle Joined

The British fleet sailed into Aboukir Bay from the northwest at about 5.30pm and closed with the French as quickly as possible as Nelson divided his force into two groups. Nearly an hour later, as the sun was setting, HMS *Goliath*, under Captain Thomas Foley, led the Royal Navy squadron into action. Captain Samuel Hood and HMS *Zealous* followed closely.

At the head of the French line, *Guerrier* and *Le Conquérant* opened fire at 6.20pm along with the batteries on Aboukir Island. Foley used an outdated atlas as a reference and spotted the gap between *Guerrier* and the shoreline. He determined that the depth of the water would permit him to sail around the van of the French line and to the leeward, exploiting an opportunity to envelop the French, engaging the enemy from two sides.

Foley made for the opening and fired a shattering broadside into *Guerrier* as *Goliath* passed the French warship's bow. French sailors scrambled to uncover their portside gun ports, tossing crates and other objects out of the way, but a second broadside from *Goliath* left *Guerrier* seriously wounded. Foley attempted to anchor opposite *Guerrier*, but his anchor line stretched beyond, and *Goliath* came alongside *Le Conquérant*, loosing yet another devastating broadside.

Hood, without charts of any kind, followed Foley aboard *Zealous*, and soon *Audacious*,



Artist Thomas Luny produced this vivid image of the Battle of the Nile, a major naval engagement that took place primarily after dark on the night of August 1, 1798. Admiral Horatio Nelson's Royal Navy squadron won a tremendous victory over the French fleet in the eastern Mediterranean.

Orion, and *Theseus* were sweeping to the landward side, where the French were most vulnerable.

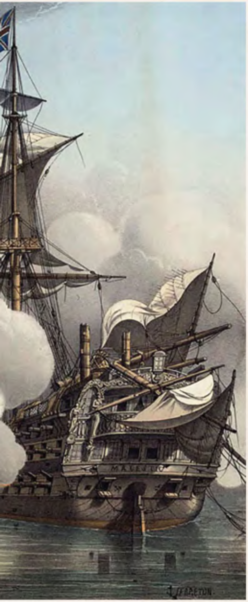
HMS *Vanguard* was the sixth ship in the British line and attacked the French *Spartiate* from seaward. The two adversaries remained locked in combat for some time. *Zealous* and *Theseus* continued to pound the hapless *Guerrier* until *Theseus* moved toward *Spartiate* and with *Vanguard*, pounded the enemy from two sides. When the French frigate *Serieuse* attacked *Goliath*, the much larger British ship-of-the-line shredded the smaller ship with a single broadside – literally blowing *Serieuse* out of the water.

HMS *Minotaur* and HMS *Defence* also drew in on the seaward side, engaging *Aquilon* and *Peuple Souverain*. HMS *Bellerophon* and HMS *Majestic* then opened against the French centre. As the British warships descended on the French, only the last three ships of Brueys' battle line were not attacked within a few minutes.

In the frenzied assault, HMS *Culloden* ran aground on the shoal, and the 50-gun HMS *Leander* came to her aid, but to no avail. Meanwhile, darkness had descended by 7pm, and the British ships raised rows of white lamps, burning as recognition signals to prevent friendly fire or collisions. *Vanguard* took a pounding from *Aquilon*, which left its forward gun crews out of action and many dead. *Minotaur* interceded, drawing fire from *Aquilon*, and possibly saving the flagship from destruction. *Leander* subsequently parted from the hopelessly stuck *Culloden* and though overmatched, blazed away at *L'Orient* and *Franklin*.

Bellerophon, its lookouts temporarily blinded by clouds of smoke, sailed past *Vanguard*, and found itself perilously close to the French flagship. Absorbing a tremendous broadside from *L'Orient*, *Bellerophon* replied gamely but lost its masts. With its officers all killed or wounded, *Bellerophon* soon drifted out of the fight. HMS *Majestic* and HMS Defence received fire from *L'Orient* and *Franklin* before *Majestic* turned to attack *Hereux* and *Tonnant*.

In the darkness, the two fleets hammered away at one another, the flashes and thunder of the cannon, fires aboard some ships, and debris and bodies floating in the water presenting a tableau of destruction. Nelson's aggressive tactics and those of his captains, whom he deemed his 'Band of Brothers' in the best Shakespearean style, maintained the advantage. HMS *Swiftsure* anchored near the bow of *L'Orient*, while *Alexander* came up on the stern, both pouring fire into vulnerable areas of the big ship.



At approximately 9pm, Nelson was wounded in the head by a shard of flying iron. He bled profusely, and a piece of his scalp lay open, obscuring his vision. Nelson was sure that the wound was mortal, but when helped below for treatment he refused to move ahead of other injured men. His wound was examined and judged superficial, and the scalp stitched.

Swiftsure, *Alexander*, *Defence*, and *Leander* blazed away at *L'Orient*, already damaged from its encounter with *Bellerophon*. *Vanguard* also fired on the French flagship. Brueys was mortally wounded, losing both legs, but continued to command until he was killed outright by a British shot. *L'Orient* was in mortal danger as well. Prior to the battle, the massive ship was being refurbished. Containers of paint and turpentine had not been secured, and soon *L'Orient* caught fire, a lookout aboard *Swiftsure* taking note of the growing flames. Nelson was summoned to *Vanguard's* deck to observe the conflagration.

At approximately 10pm, the fires, burning out of control, reached the powder magazines, and *L'Orient* erupted in a tremendous explosion that was heard for miles. The shockwave caused the sailors on both sides to pause as the opposing ships were showered with debris and in the deathly 15-minute lull the French flagship sank. The British pulled 70 French survivors, from a complement of 1,100 sailors, out of the water.

The remaining French ships continued to resist after the loss of *L'Orient*, but soon the battle was over. *Franklin*, with only three serviceable guns remaining, struck its colours just after 11pm. As the firing ebbed, the six ships forward in the French line had surrendered. When *Spartiate* quit the fight, the ship had taken 76 direct hits from *Vanguard* and *Theseus*. The dismasted *Tonnant* ran aground, and its crew held out for three days before surrendering. *Hereuse* and *Mercure* also ran aground while *Timoleon* was immobilised, and its crew burned their ship to the waterline rather than surrender.

Dawn and Devastation

As the sun rose, *Guillaume Tell* and *Genereux*, along with the frigates *Diana* and *Justice*, made good their escape from the debacle in Aboukir Bay. *Zealous* attempted to cut off the French ships off but was unable to do so. Still, the extent of the British victory was evident.

Nelson's fleet had taken severe punishment, but none of his ships were sunk. Most of them, however, had lost masts or rigging, and 218 British sailors were dead and 677 wounded. *Bellerophon* alone had taken 201 casualties, *Majestic* 193. The French, however, had suffered 5,225 killed and 3,105 wounded or taken prisoner. Brueys' command virtually ceased to exist as a fighting force. Nine French ships-of- the-line had been captured; two were run aground, one was ablaze by the hand of its crew, and the great *L'Orient* was sunk.

A shore party from *Swiftsure* disabled the French guns on Aboukir Island.

In the Wake of Aboukir Bay

A tinge of irony accompanies Nelson's great victory. Napoleon Bonaparte, a gifted commander of land armies whose litany of triumphs was long, had influenced the outcome of the fight at the mouth of the Nile – and lost. The first great defeat suffered by the French general was at sea.

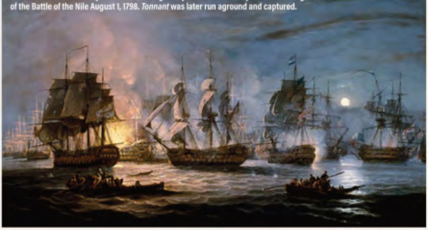
Nelson sent news of the battle to India, Jervis at Gibraltar, and the Admiralty in London, where it was received with great relief and joy. The man of the hour, Nelson became a national hero, destined for even greater triumph in the service of the Royal Navy.

Immediately, the battle influenced the conduct of the French campaign in Egypt. It has been said that when he received the first report of the defeat Napoleon declared: "So this is the end of my navy. Can it be that I am fated to perish in Egypt?"

The notion of threatening India was dismissed entirely, and an invasion of England or Ireland remained out of reach. The French lines of supply and communication across the expanse of the Mediterranean were jeopardised. Although the land campaign continued for months, it was doomed to fail due to British mastery of the sea and an effective blockade of French ports. Support for a civilian uprising on Malta led to a prolonged siege that negated its use as a French base. Bonaparte left his army in Egypt in 1799, returning to France, and the once formidable fighting force eventually disintegrated following its defeat by a British expeditionary force.

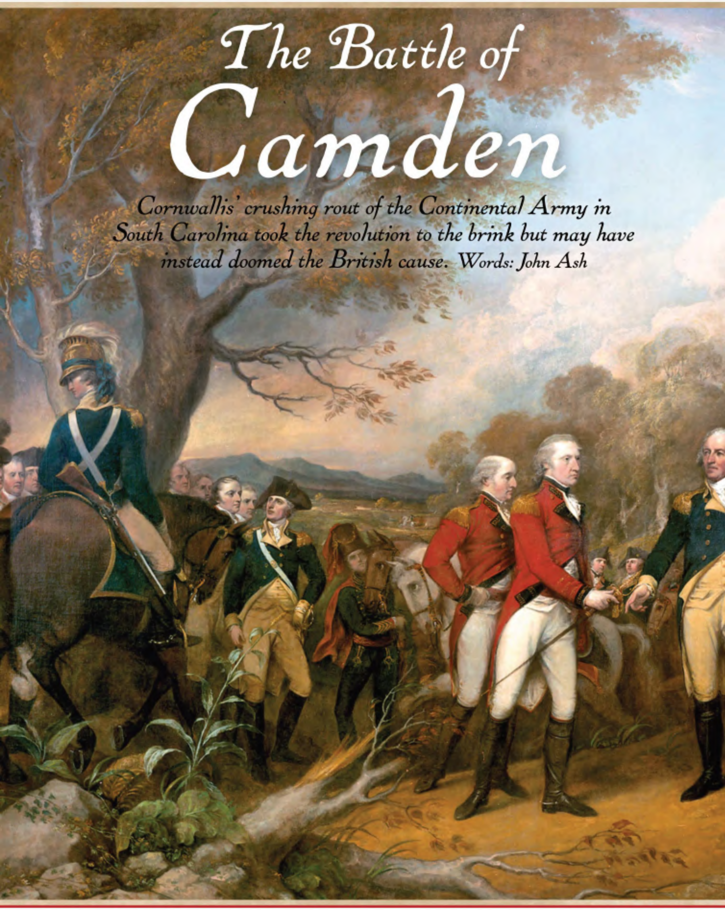
As the Battle of Aboukir Bay was fought, the nations of Europe were again forming a coalition to fight the French. The British victory contributed to the coming of the War of the Second Coalition, particularly the decision of the Russian and Austrian governments to renew the struggle.

Artist Louis Le Breton painted this image of the French ship-of-the-line *Tonnant*, dismasted and with many casualties, taking heavy fire from HMS *Majestic* at the height of the Battle of the Nile August 1, 1798. *Tonnant* was later run aground and captured.



The Battle of Camden

Cornwallis' crushing rout of the Continental Army in South Carolina took the revolution to the brink but may have instead doomed the British cause. Words: John Ash

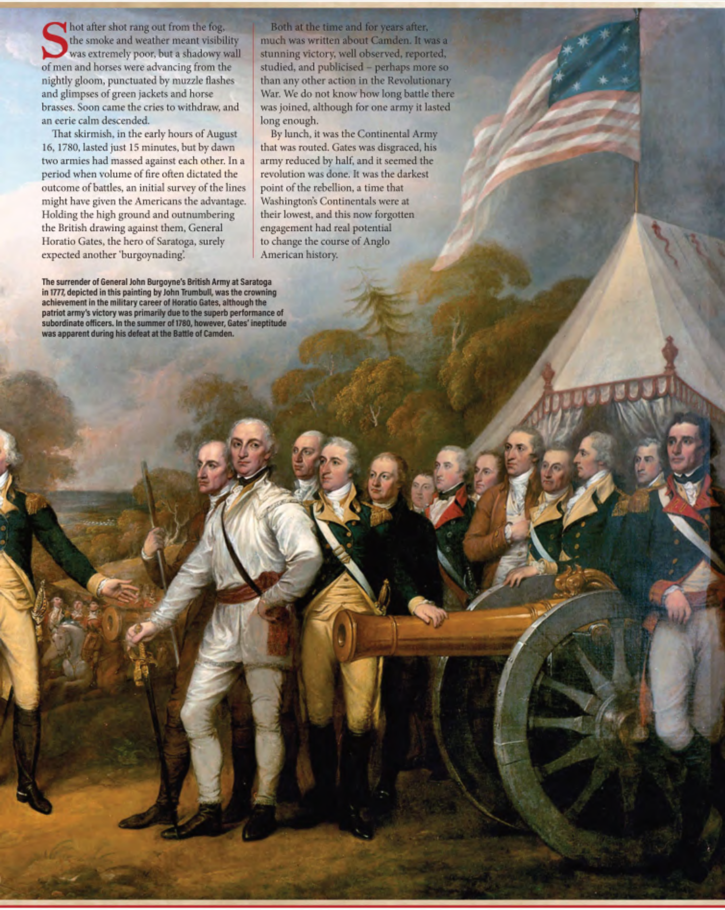


Shot after shot rang out from the fog, the smoke and weather meant visibility was extremely poor, but a shadowy wall of men and horses were advancing from the nightly gloom, punctuated by muzzle flashes and glimpses of green jackets and horse brasses. Soon came the cries to withdraw, and an eerie calm descended.

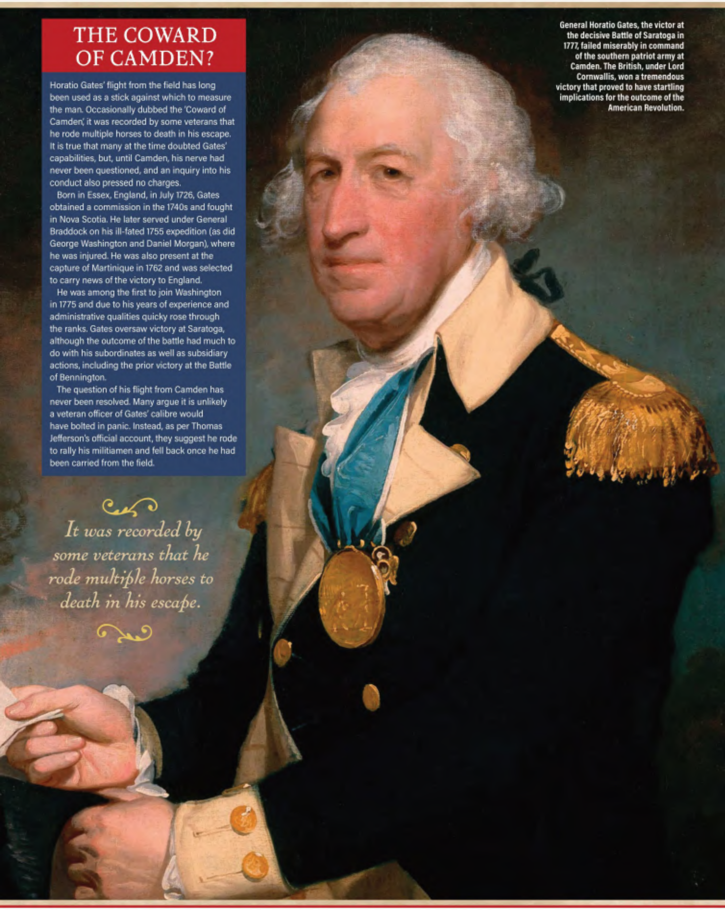
That skirmish, in the early hours of August 16, 1780, lasted just 15 minutes, but by dawn two armies had massed against each other. In a period when volume of fire often dictated the outcome of battles, an initial survey of the lines might have given the Americans the advantage. Holding the high ground and outnumbering the British drawing against them, General Horatio Gates, the hero of Saratoga, surely expected another 'burgoynading'.

Both at the time and for years after, much was written about Camden. It was a stunning victory, well observed, reported, studied, and publicised – perhaps more so than any other action in the Revolutionary War. We do not know how long battle there was joined, although for one army it lasted long enough.

By lunch, it was the Continental Army that was routed. Gates was disgraced, his army reduced by half, and it seemed the revolution was done. It was the darkest point of the rebellion, a time that Washington's Continentals were at their lowest, and this now forgotten engagement had real potential to change the course of Anglo American history.



The surrender of General John Burgoyne's British Army at Saratoga in 1777, depicted in this painting by John Trumbull, was the crowning achievement in the military career of Horatio Gates, although the patriot army's victory was primarily due to the superb performance of subordinate officers. In the summer of 1780, however, Gates' ineptitude was apparent during his defeat at the Battle of Camden.



General Horatio Gates, the victor at the decisive Battle of Saratoga in 1777, failed miserably in command of the southern patriot army at Camden. The British, under Lord Cornwallis, won a tremendous victory that proved to have startling implications for the outcome of the American Revolution.

THE COWARD OF CAMDEN?

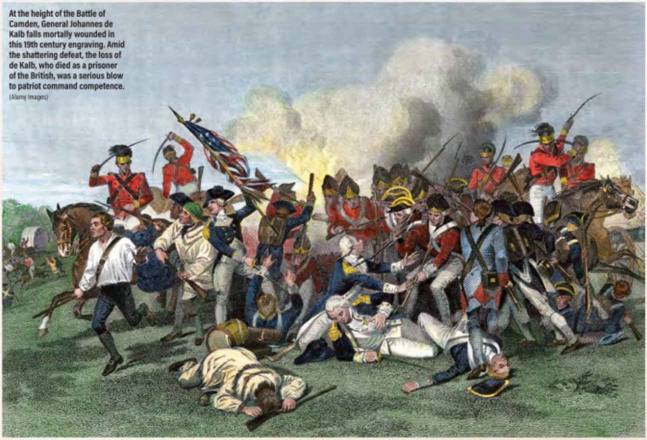
Horatio Gates' flight from the field has long been used as a stick against which to measure the man. Occasionally dubbed the 'Coward of Camden', it was recorded by some veterans that he rode multiple horses to death in his escape. It is true that many at the time doubted Gates' capabilities, but, until Camden, his nerve had never been questioned, and an inquiry into his conduct also pressed no charges.

Born in Essex, England, in July 1726, Gates obtained a commission in the 1740s and fought in Nova Scotia. He later served under General Braddock on his ill-fated 1755 expedition (as did George Washington and Daniel Morgan), where he was injured. He was also present at the capture of Martinique in 1762 and was selected to carry news of the victory to England.

He was among the first to join Washington in 1775 and due to his years of experience and administrative qualities quicky rose through the ranks. Gates oversaw victory at Saratoga, although the outcome of the battle had much to do with his subordinates as well as subsidiary actions, including the prior victory at the Battle of Bennington.

The question of his flight from Camden has never been resolved. Many argue it is unlikely a veteran officer of Gates' calibre would have bolted in panic. Instead, as per Thomas Jefferson's official account, they suggest he rode to rally his militiamen and fell back once he had been carried from the field.

It was recorded by some veterans that he rode multiple horses to death in his escape.



At the height of the Battle of Camden, General Johannes de Kalb falls mortally wounded in this 19th century engraving. Amid the shattering defeat, the loss of de Kalb, who died as a prisoner of the British, was a serious blow to patriot command competence. (Alamy Images)

The Road to Camden

The circuitous route to this decisive battle, fought along the Waxhaw Road about five miles outside Camden, South Carolina, was one which charted the rise and fall of Horatio Gates, a Continental Army major general upon who's shoulders rested the plight of the rebellion.

The first three years of the war were focused squarely on the north, particularly around Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. The north was the birthplace of the revolt and where it unfolded. In fact, in the less-dense south, where half the population toiled as slaves, support for the British was much greater.

The war had developed into a stalemate, but Gates' victory at Saratoga in New York changed that. His successes added a new word to the vocabulary: to 'Burgoyne' or to 'burgoynade', a manoeuvre to surround and capture a loyalist force as Gates had done to General John Burgoyne in October 1777. Saratoga blunted British efforts while the prospect of overall victory was for the first time realistic, inspiring more in the south to rise up. Moreover, it helped win over an ally in France.

Many among the rebels hoped and expected Gates to repeat his success, but with their chances of quelling the rebellion under threat the British changed strategy. Moving to defend the more loyal southern colonies, the southern capitals fell as the British expanded their presence, eventually moving into the backwoods localities where revolutionary fervour was at its highest. Charleston fell in May 1780 and before long Georgia and South Carolina were under firm control. Just one significant continental formation, the Delaware regiment, under Baron Johann de Kalb (a German-born major general who had his eyes on wider command) remained in the Carolinas.

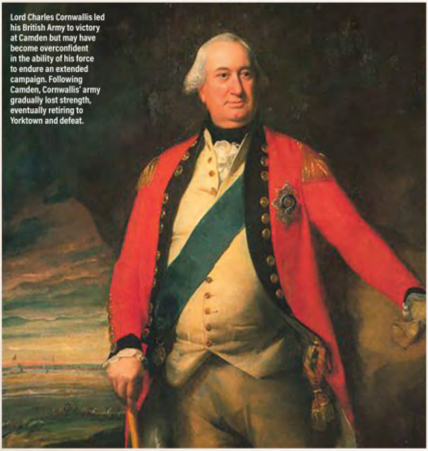
Rebel morale was crippled as the British regained the initiative. Yet Gates was a popular figurehead, his victory at Saratoga stood in sharp contrast to Washington's near uninterrupted string of defeats. In truth, Washington doubted Gates' prowess and capability, but he was popular among the men. Worth noting too is the sobering fact that Washington's less than admirable battlefield record led to conspiracy, and there was a plot to have him replaced by none other than Horatio Gates.

Known as the Conway Cabal, after its architect, General Thomas Conway, the scheme was quelled in 1778 but Washington nonetheless despised his political rival and considered him to be a poor commander. He put Gates' victories at Saratoga down to his subordinate officers and had good reason for such conviction.

When Gates took command of the Southern Department of the Continental Army, he did so not as Washington's first choice, that was Nathaniel Greene. But Congress disagreed; equally they felt the eager de Kalb, being foreign born, was unlikely to inspire as much confidence among the militias. Indeed, when Gates began the advance on July 27, he marched with the strength of newly raised hopes, boosted by his mere presence, and also with corresponding concerns developing in Anglo-Loyalist commanders.

Gates was confident he could reverse proceedings in the south, and many had confidence in him, but it was an illusion all too quickly shattered. He opted to seize the largest of the British outposts in the colony, Camden, a remote station roughly 180 miles from the sea and vital for control of South Carolina's inland regions. Gates took three ill-supplied Continental Army regiments, 1,000 men from the 1st/2nd Maryland and 1st Delaware, and marched 20 miles a day at times, through the stifling heat and humidity of the Carolina wood and swamplands. The men lived off the land, which meant many simply would not eat at all. The inspired masses that swelled Gates' 'Grand Army' each day boosted fighting strength but put ever increasing pressure on a fragile line of supply.

Meanwhile, at Camden, Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis, received news of the impending attack.



Lord Charles Cornwallis led his British Army to victory at Camden but may have become overconfident in the ability of his force to endure an extended campaign. Following Camden, Cornwallis' army gradually lost strength, eventually retiring to Yorktown and defeat.

Forming Up

By the time Gates was a day from Camden, his force was between 4,000 and 5,000 strong. His core of professional soldiers was backed up by some 3,700 militia. As the men settled before a long night's march, Gates ordered the issue of food: molasses and cornmeal. Many of his men were hungry, more were ill, and the meal made matters worse as dysentery spread rife. Nevertheless, they struck camp and set off into the night with no clue as to what stood before them.

Earl Cornwallis had spent his time wisely. Opting to sortie, his fed, rested, well-supplied army left Camden prepared to fight – though neither Gates nor the Earl knew their armies were so close. Five miles north of the outpost, in the early hours, around 2.30am, a party of dragoons scouting ahead happened across an American mounted patrol from the Armand's Legion, and a 15 minute clash of sabre, carbine, and pistol ensued, both sides retiring into the dark as the two armies halted.

Cornwallis ordered a dawn attack, while Gates prepared his army to stand-to. The British were heavily outnumbered and held the low ground, which also was more restrictive, offering limited manoeuvring. Gates had good reason to be confident.

The British positioned Lieutenant Colonel James Webster, a seasoned officer with much experience of leading line and light infantry, to the right. His brigade consisted of the 23rd and 33rd Regiments of Foot, together with two cannon. This was the professional core of the British Army, and was massed, as was the British way, on the right flank.

Lord Rawdon, another veteran colonel, held the left with a loyalist regiment of American and Irish volunteers, the Royal North Carolina Regiment of militia, and the North Carolina Volunteers. He was also supported by two guns and by the infantry component of Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton's provincial British Legion. In reserve, Cornwallis held the 71st Regiment of Foot and the green-jacketed dragoons of Tarleton's British Legion. Also present were light infantry companies and a formation of pioneers.

Instead of putting his strongest forces – the continental regiments – on his left, Gates mirrored the British and assembled two regiments of his best troops and three cannon on his right flank, under the command of Brigadier General Mordecai Gist. He kept the 1st Marylands and two guns in reserve with Brigadier General William Smallwood and positioned two guns and the North Carolina militia in the centre, under Brigadier General Richard Caswell. Fielded to Gates' left was Brigadier General Edward Stevens with the untested Virginia Militia, Armand's Legion, and a small group of around 20 mounted scouts from South Carolina. Also on the left were Lieutenant Colonel Charles Porterfield's rifle-armed light infantry.

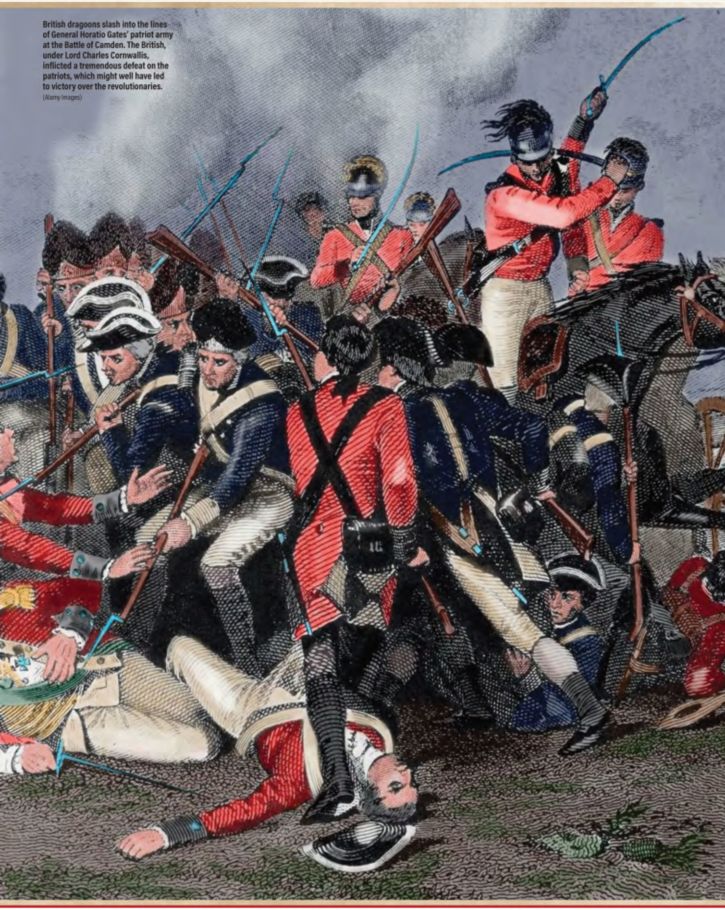
Smoke and Steel

The battle that followed was blisteringly quick. Webster advanced through the fog, his regiments screaming battle cries. The marksmen among the Virginias fired first, but Webster's men held firm and loosed a volley. The ranks erupted in flashes of smoke and fire that ripped through the inexperienced militia, which faltered with many yet to fire their first shot. Webster charged his men with bayonets, and the militia crumbled – not having bayonets of their own, proper training, nor that early-modern equaliser, cannon. Webster's infantry wheeled left to attack the flank of the more experienced North Carolinians, while the dragoons rode into the rear. The fog prevented the Americans from noticing the threat, and the rout spread.

Soon, just the continental regiments were standing, though they did not know it, nor were they aware that Gates had already left the field. Unlike the militia, the Marylands and Delawares had both steel and spirit. Gist's lines exchanged multiple volleys with loyalist militia, and in a daring counter he charged his line and captured scores of loyalists. But this could not reverse the overwhelming strength massing against him, and he escaped the field as the Marylands collapsed. Johann de Kalb was determined to fight on. Left in charge of the last vestiges of resistance, he was felled from his horse, shot three times, and acquired a collection of wounds in the melee, the worst a sabre cut across his head. Kalb was captured and died days later; his stand earned him the respect of Cornwallis.

Once the British had encircled the last men standing, the lop sided victory was complete. It was crushing, the worst defeat of an American field force during the revolution. Cornwallis estimated that between 700 and 900 patriots were killed, and the British captured another 1,000. Many historians now believe the numbers killed were less, around 300-400, but just 700 men reassembled with Gates in the intervening days and many survivors never rejoined him. A large quantity of muskets, ammunition and

> *The ranks erupted in flashes of smoke and fire.*



British dragoons slash into the lines of General Horatio Gates' patriot army at the Battle of Camden. The British, under Lord Charles Cornwallis, inflicted a tremendous defeat on the patriots, which might well have led to victory over the revolutionaries. (Alamy Images) powder were captured along with some 200 wagons. Gone was the majority of continental manpower and supply in the southern theatre, men, and equipment it could ill afford to lose.

Gates' errors put the entire rebellion in jeopardy. The defeat caused ripples among revolutionaries, many believing the situation was unrecoverable. Famously, in September, Benedict Arnold, one of Gates' effective subordinates at Saratoga, would defect to the British embittered by his personal losses. Even the youngest realised the significance of the disaster while Captain John Marshall wrote: "There never was a victory more complete, or a defeat more total." George Washington himself noted that "the stroke is severe," while Congressman James Duane bemoaned a defeat "so deplorable a catastrophe." Camden led the Dutch to cancel a loan agreement and also threatened to curtail French support – if it wasn't for the diplomatic efforts of Benjamin Franklin, they surely would have reneged.

Overconfidence on Both Sides

Mutiny threatened the cause, even in the steadfast north. Camden was arguably Britain's finest hour, the one moment when it could have ended the war once and for all – and they knew it.

Gates, a British-born officer, was unfamiliar with the tactics Cornwallis employed. He was overconfident, recklessly overextended his force, and underestimated his opposite number. He also greatly overestimated the capability of his militiamen, and by positioning the bulk of his professional force to his right (and placing a regular unit in reserve), he created an insurmountable mismatch. While Gates did outnumber the British, his assuredness was misplaced, as he believed the health of his army was better than it was, when it had been badly depleted before a shot was fired – as many as 1,000 men were too ill to fight.

Although Gates escaped the political wrangling following his defeat, he never held major field command again. His disgracing shattered his reputation and ended any attempt to further his political ambitions until after the war.

Even though it would be difficult to rebuild the southern army, Gates did much to salvage his command, inspiring guerrilla activity and forming a cadre of light infantry. Most importantly, he convinced congress to return Daniel Morgan from retirement. Morgan reformed how militia were used, which was adopted after the Battle of Cowpens.

The reaction in Britain couldn't have been more different. Public support soared, and predictions of imminent victory were easy to make. Cornwallis was praised, as were his subordinates, Rawdon, Tarleton, and Webster. Loyalists and British troops in New York and Charleston marked the battle with celebration, while Gates and the rebels were the subjects of ridicule. Senior ministers, such as Lord George Germain, Secretary of State for the American Department, declared that Camden guaranteed Britain's hold of the southern colonies.

Both Germain and King George III described the battle as the distinguishing moment of the war. Much faith was placed in Cornwallis and the training and experience of those under his command. Having so easily swept aside a numerically superior force, it was felt American numbers could no longer better British proficiency and skill. Cornwallis wasted no time. Sweeping north, he wiped out pockets of insurrection, but Camden appeared to make him, one of the leading strategists of the time, overconfident – even complacent.

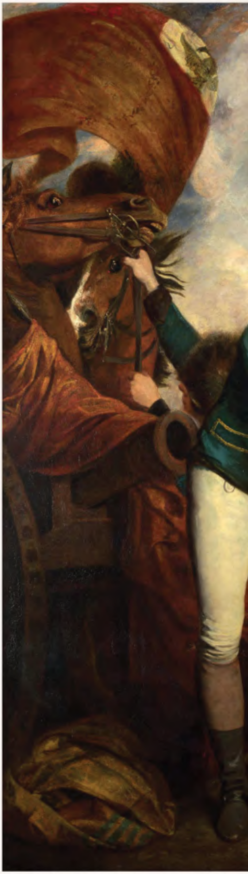
Influenced by the poor performance of the American militia, Cornwallis neglected the loyalist militias forming a large component of British strength, while he replicated the tactics used at Camden in later battles. Yet, the Continental Army was improving and adapting, as was its militia. The British usually controlled the field at the end of any given day, but the Americans were inflicting ever more casualties. Victory was generating diminishing returns.

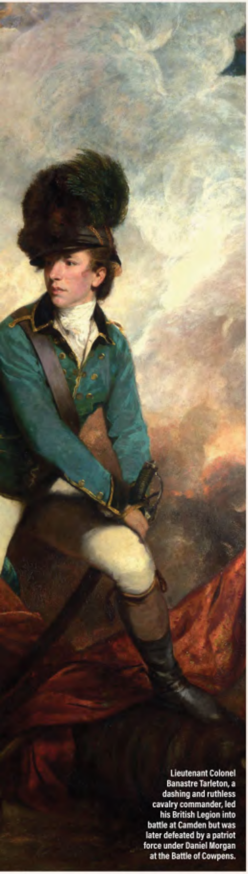
It was felt American numbers could no longer better British proficiency.

Cornwallis was being bled dry, and had victory at Camden been harder won, an improved view on militiamen and tweaking of tactics may well have changed the shape of the British Army in the south. Instead, there was little change, and then came the shocking reverse at Kings Mountain on October 7. Nathanial Greene then fought a string of battles where his control of the field was almost not important, so long as he cut the British deep. Eventually, Cornwallis' army had to rest, and so it was forced north.

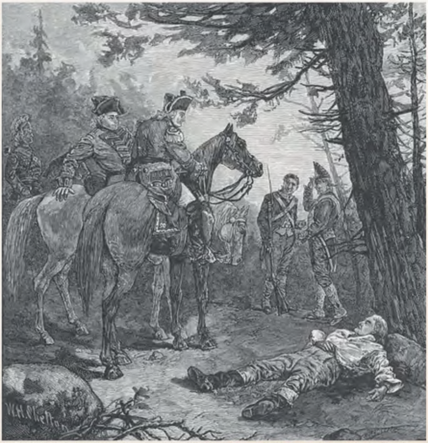
The Victory that Cost the South?

The implications of Camden were huge. First, it reinvigorated the British campaign, and a continental army was destroyed with 2,000 casualties, eight cannon seized, and its supply train captured in its entirety. As Gates' force was formed by redeploying continental formations from the north and swelled by provincial militiamen, defeat weakened the northern position and eroded local strength.





Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton, a dashing and ruthless cavalry commander, led his British Legion into battle at Camden but was later defeated by a patriot force under Daniel Morgan at the Battle of Cowpens.



As British officers look on, Baron Johann de Kalb lies dying beneath a tree after his capture during the Battle of Camden. With the victory, the British Army came closer than ever to shattering the rebellion in the North American colonies.

Then, the revered Johann de Kalb was mortally wounded. He had eyed overall command in the south; we can only speculate what impact he may have had.

British professionalism picked apart the rebellion, but however decisive the victory, was it possible to inflict even greater losses? After the battle, British cavalry harried the retreating Americans for a good 20 miles, but a large proportion still managed to escape. A more relentless pursuit could have meant Gates' successors would not have had a field force – nor a theatre – to command.

Alternatively, had Gates' defeat been less severe, could the British have won the south? Perhaps. Camden led to the sacking of, as far as the British were concerned, one of the continentals' brightest leaders. It was a boon, and they understandably expected a collapse. For the revolutionaries, even though exactly how much credit is due to Gates for his victory three years earlier at Saratoga is debatable, he was nonetheless influential. However, it appears the impact of Gates' early retirement was not that pronounced. Washington's concerns had been vindicated, and it may well have been better for the British had Gates retained his position.

Washington's choice pick, Nathanael Greene, 'the fighting Quaker', inherited a command of just 1,500 battered, unpaid, and hungry men. Nevertheless, he went on to erode British control, directing three strategic victories and prosecuting an effective guerrilla campaign against Cornwallis' superior force. He would become known as 'the Saviour of the South'.

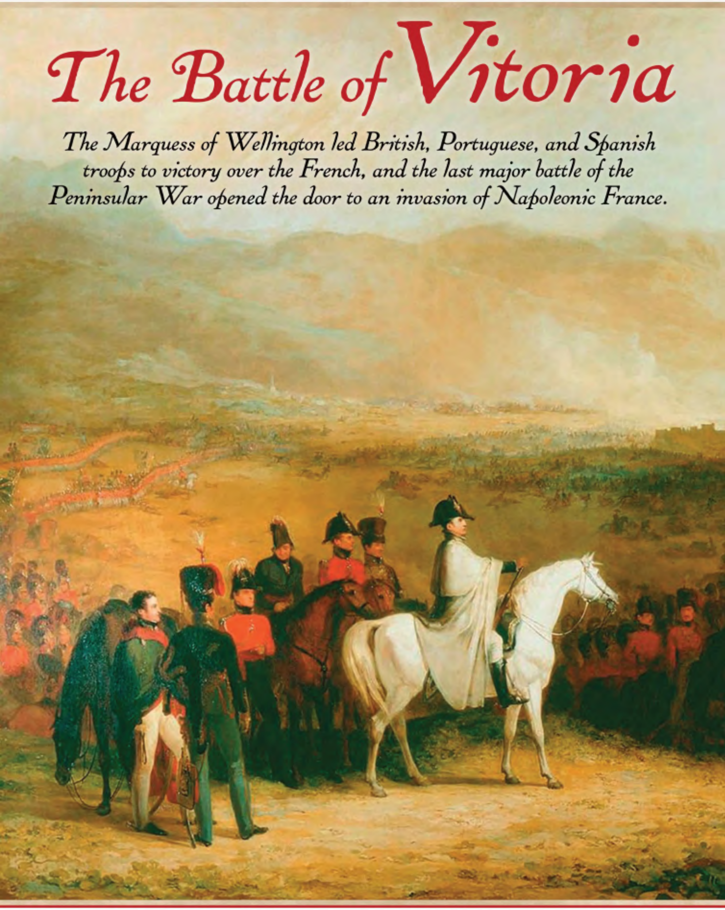
Camden also brought Daniel Morgan back into the fold, and in January 1781, he led 1,900 men against Banastre Tarleton at the Battle of Cowpens, sustaining minimal losses to leave the 1,200 strong British force with just a fifth of its strength. Moreover, Tarleton's force was considered to be among the best within the British Army.

The humiliation at Camden could have brought an end to the revolution, and had Cornwallis learned from Gates' defeat rather than put total stead in the quality of his soldiers and leaders, perhaps the British may have won the war. Instead, Cowpens was a turning point; it shook British morale, motivated the southern states, and effectively ended Cornwallis' chances of consolidating his grip.

Between them, Morgan and Greene forced Cornwallis' battered army into Yorktown, and there, with growing French involvement in the war, they were but a few months from turning the heaviest of defeats into the unlikeliest of victories.

The Battle of Vitoria

The Marquess of Wellington led British, Portuguese, and Spanish troops to victory over the French, and the last major battle of the Peninsular War opened the door to an invasion of Napoleonic France.



King Joseph Napoleon Bonaparte looked left and right. The British were coming, their Portuguese and Spanish allies alongside.

It was a stunning moment for Napoleon Bonaparte's older brother, installed as King of Spain prior to the former's ill-advised invasion of Russia. Joseph and Marshal Jean-Baptiste Jourdan, a veteran commander who had fought with distinction in the American and French Revolutions and the earlier Coalition wars, led the French armies massed around the town of Vitoria, and they were being outflanked even as their commanders watched.

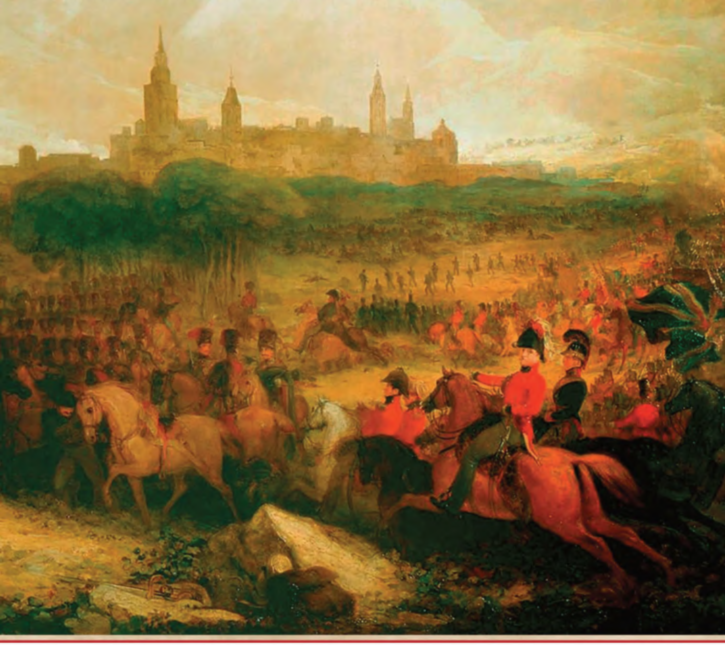
Earlier, several French generals had advised that the Marquess of Wellington would advance directly toward Vitoria, along the most easily travelled route, never believing that the enemy would advance to the north, across a rugged mountain road that was thought impassable.

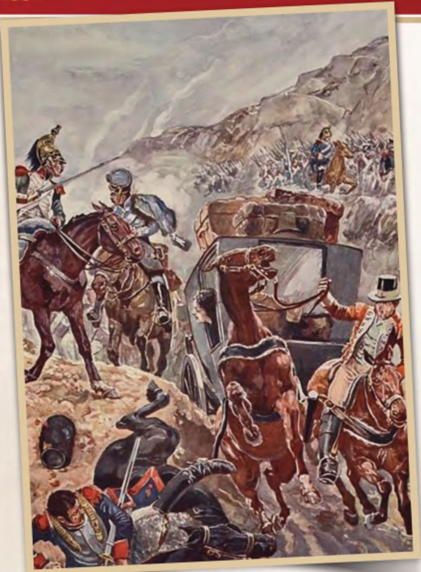
To make matters worse, Joseph had lost complete contact with the British army for four critical days, as Spanish guerrillas were a constant thorn in his side. They slashed at his lines of communication, screened Wellington's movements, and generally disrupted the operations of Joseph's command, three armies that had converged on the area around Vitoria, numbering 60,000 soldiers and 150 cannon. Now, time was running out. The future of the French domination of Spain was in grave peril.

The Battle of Vitoria, fought June 21, 1813, sealed the fate of Napoleon's Spanish adventure, and opened the door for a later allied invasion of France itself. And it offered a foreshadowing of Wellington's tactical prowess – which would come to full flower at Waterloo two years later.

After fixing his foe in the valley of the River Zadorra, Wellington divided his army of 78,000 British, Portuguese, and Spanish troops

In this painting by artist George Jones, the Marquess of Wellington, astride a white horse, observes the action during the Battle of Vitoria. The allied victory of June 21, 1813, expelled the French from Spain and signalled the final days of the Peninsular War. The victory further positioned the allied army to invade France.





This painting reveals the chaos of the French retreat from Vitoria. Their defeat on June 21, 1813, became a rout, and the army of King Joseph Napoleon Bonaparte fell back toward Pamplona. Within months of the defeat, the Peninsular War came to an end.

supported by 90 field guns into four columns, intent on assailing the French defensive lines, anchored by the Zadorra to the north and west and the Heights of Puebla in the south, from three directions. A fourth column would slice into the French rear in an effort to cut off their line of retreat.

From early morning to dusk, Wellington held the initiative, finally forcing the French centre and left to pull back. Late in the day, Joseph's right collapsed. The French army retreated in disorder down the Salvatierra Road toward Pamplona, abandoning wagon trains laden with treasure plundered during the French domination of Spain. But beyond the booty lay the undoing of Napoleon and his overambitious quest to conquer Europe and bring Britain to its economic knees with the imposition of the Continental Plan.

Fighting on two fronts, the French capacity to wage war was gutted. In the aftermath of Napoleon's disastrous invasion of Russia, the defeat at Vitoria ejected the French from Spain, and the Peninsular War came to an end in April 1814. Just a month later, the wider War of the Sixth Coalition ended in Napoleon's ruin. Allied armies occupied Paris and the scourge of Europe was headed to exile on the island of Elba.

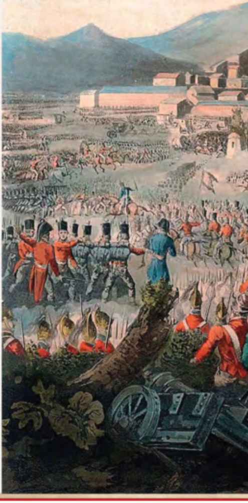
Attack and Retreat

In early 1812, the Marquess of Wellington planned an aggressive movement against the French forces on the Iberian Peninsula. The war in Spain and Portugal was in its seventh year, and pressure on the French was an endeavour worth pursuing, particularly as Napoleon embarked on his foray into Russia that summer.

British forces had already launched an offensive that at first held great promise. Wellington strengthened his base of operations in Portugal in January, taking the fortress of Cuidad Rodriguez by storm and then successfully capturing the town of Badajoz in a three-week siege in April. Forcing his opponent, Marshal Auguste de Marmont, out of Portugal, he inflicted a stinging defeat on the French at the Battle of Salamanca.

Swiftly, the British seized Madrid. Marmont fell back to the north and a linkup with King Joseph's army. The king exerted command in name only however, and the real military commander of French forces was Jourdan. The momentum of Wellington's advance was inevitably slowed, as he was unable to prevent the junction of the French armies. Soon enough, the British were faced with a numerically superior enemy and compelled to retreat, giving up Madrid and then as autumn progressed, all the territorial gains of the offensive.

Disheartened, Wellington teetered on the brink of defeat. Nearly 18,000 of his troops had taken ill or were otherwise



unfit for service. Supplies were limited, and a concerted push from the French might spell disaster. Jourdan, however, did not relish an open, decisive engagement with the British. Such may well have been the saving grace of Wellington's tired and tattered force.

Reversal of Fortune

While Wellington licked his wounds, there was some reason for optimism. He had managed to retain control of Cuidad Rodrigo and Badajoz, together known as the keys to Spain because they were astride the two invasion routes that led from Portugal. Therefore, a renewal of offensive operations contemplated for 1813 would be a simpler task.

Meanwhile, as the debacle in Russia unfolded, Napoleon was bled white. The epic misery of the Grand Army's retreat across Europe engendered further complications for the emperor. Obviously, continuing to fight allied forces in Germany would require additional troops. Napoleon ordered reinforcements to join his army in central Europe, stripping Joseph and Jourdan of veteran soldiers, while Wellington recovered, training and resupplying his men and receiving substantial reinforcements of his own.

A surge of Spanish troops further augmented Wellington's ranks and brought control of the port of A Coruna in northern Spain. Wellington, therefore, gained freedom of movement and was no longer required to directly attack the locus of French strength around Madrid. On the eve of his renewed offensive, the allied army included veteran British and Portuguese troops along with the untried Spanish contingent.

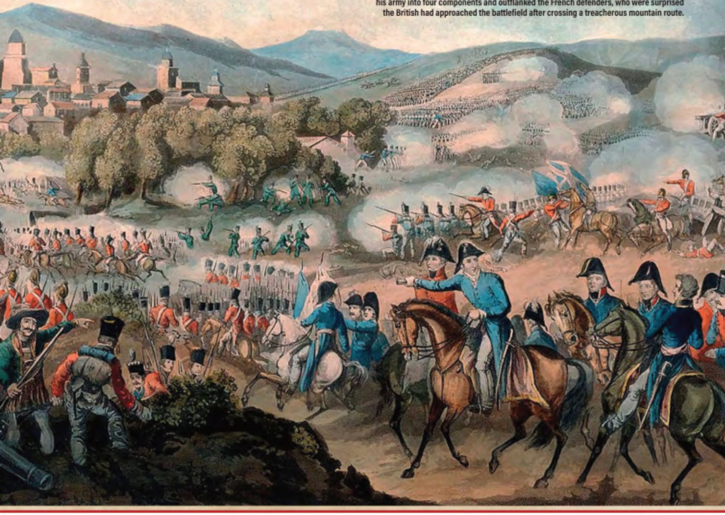
Across the Mountains

On May 22, 1813, after delays caused by heavy rains, Wellington stepped off on the decisive campaign of the Peninsular War. Dividing his army into two columns, Wellington led a smaller force toward Salamanca to keep the attention of the French while the bulk of the British army, under Sir Thomas Graham, advanced north and then turned east toward Valladolid. The British army marched 200 miles in four weeks, taking French outposts and supply depots along the way – and facing little opposition. Wellington captured Salamanca, Zamora, and Valladolid. On June 13, the fortress of Burgos fell, blown up by the French as the bold movement to the north and east forced them out of Madrid as well as positions between the Rivers Tagus and Douro.

As French troops fell back, they were obliged to shepherd a great wagon train. Stretching 12 miles, the wagons were laden with gold and treasure appropriated from Spain and hopefully destined to finance Napoleon's war effort in Germany. By mid-June, the French exodus had reached the town of Vitoria. At last, Joseph was goaded into taking a stand. The precious wagon train was ponderously slow and negotiating the narrow streets of Vitoria would take time. Further, the allied movement had brought the enemy relatively close to the French frontier and it was crucial to protect the roads that led north from the town.

The French deployed in three lines facing west and roughly resembling an 'L' shape. Jourdan became ill with a fever on June 20 and

This engraving by Heath & Sutherland depicts the furious action during the Battle of Vitoria with the Spanish town seen in the distance. The Marquess of Wellington divided his army into four components and outflanked the French defenders, who were surprised the British had approached the battlefield after crossing a treacherous mountain route.



exercised little personal direction during the establishment of these positions. Stretching across the entry to the valley, the first line was supported by a second at the sharp, hairpin bend of the River Zadorra, and a third that covered a widening plain just before Vitoria proper. The river and Puebla Heights were considered solid anchors. However, in their haste the French neglected to stoutly defend the crossings of the Zadorra, particularly at Tres Puentes near their second line. Jourdan also hoped that reinforcements, 12,000 strong in three divisions under General Bertrand Clausel, might reach the field before the looming battle began.

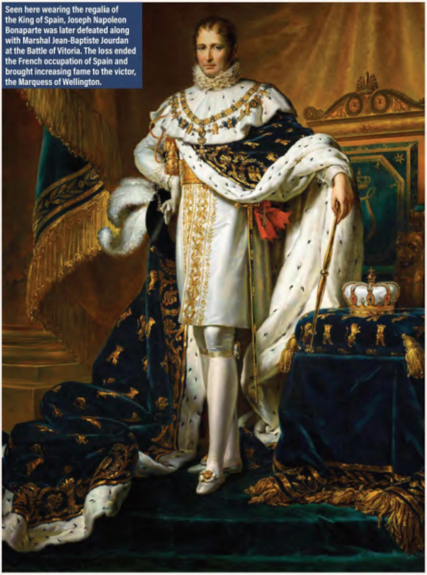
Rather than continuing the direct route to close with his adversary, Wellington chose to traverse the rugged mountains and cross the River Ebro, a tactic the French did not consider achievable. Skirmishes on June 18 revealed to Joseph and Jourdan that the allied army had indeed executed the mountainous march and was poised to outflank them. Wellington consolidated his army on June 20 and developed a plan of attack. Time was of the essence as intelligence reports revealed that Clausel would not reach the area until June 22.

Wellington divided his forces once again, this time into four components. Sir Rowland Hill was to launch the attack against the French from the south, leading 20,000 men, including the infantry of the 2nd Division and two cavalry brigades along with Portuguese and Spanish divisions. Wellington would command the 3rd and 7th Divisions in their assault from the northwest, as well as the attack of the Light and 4th Divisions directly from the west. Graham was to lead 25,000 troops of the 1st and 5th British Divisions along with a Spanish division and two Portuguese brigades to cut off the French retreat to the north.

THE KING & THE EMPEROR

When King Joseph Napoleon Bonaparte escaped from the battlefield at Vitoria, leaving the treasure-laden wagon train to the British, his personal baggage was captured as well. One of the items discovered was a silver chamber pot. The 14th Light Dragoons, which later became the 14th Hussars and the King's Royal Hussars, laid claim to the pot, and to this day it remains a trophy of war. Nicknamed 'The Emperor,' it is filled with champagne for toasts that are held at dinners and special events.

Joseph Napoleon Bonaparte, whose reign as King of Spain had ended abruptly, later used the title Comte de Survilliers and departed from Europe after his younger brother's final defeat in 1815. Joseph emigrated to the United States and spent years on a New Jersey estate, just across the river from Philadelphia. Apparently, he had managed to stuff some jewels into his pockets during his flight from the field at Vitoria and later sold them. He relocated to London in 1832, died in Florence, Italy, at age 76 in 1844, and is interred at Les Invalides in Paris.


Seen here wearing the regalia of the King of Spain, Joseph Napoleon Bonaparte was later defeated along with Marshal Jean-Baptiste Jourdan at the Battle of Vitoria. The loss ended the French occupation of Spain and brought increasing fame to the victor, the Marquess of Wellington.

Victory at Vitoria

At 8am on June 21, Hill attacked Puebla Heights and the narrow plain south of the Zadorra. As allied troops took the high ground, the French commander in the area, General Honoré Gazan, ordered a counterattack. During the brisk fighting, Colonel Henry Cadogan, commander of the 1st Brigade, 2nd Division, was mortally wounded, and after the battle Wellington wrote, "In him His Majesty has lost an officer of great merit and tried gallantry…" Both sides fed reinforcements into the struggle, the allies holding on despite repeated French attempts to dislodge them. Hill also advanced beyond the heights along the Burgos road and took the village of Subijana to the north.

Wellington was on the move north of the Zadorra, and Gazan asked Jourdan, who had returned to his post, for reinforcements to prevent the turning of his right flank. However, Jourdan was preoccupied with his left and refused the request, ordering troops from the second line forward to cover the Logrono road.

Around 10am, Graham's column approached the Zadorra north of Vitoria and proceeded to cross the lightly defended bridges there. When Jourdan received word of this movement, he ordered Gazan and the third defensive line back toward Vitoria to counter the threat to his flank. Graham got enough troops across the river to establish a strong position, but the French fought tenaciously to deny any further progress. Shifting his force upriver, Graham was again stymied. He halted attacks for a while to bring artillery forward and considered a heavier assault in the afternoon.

As the fighting proceeded, Wellington was informed that the bridges across the Zadorra at Tres Puentes, near the hairpin bend of the stream, were unguarded. He despatched Brigadier James Kempt's brigade of the Light Division to seize one of the spans. It was secured without opposition. Somewhat confused as to the timing of the attack by the troops between his own command and that of Graham, Wellington sent an aide to inquire as to the holdup, particularly to determine the whereabouts of the 7th division, under General George Ramsay, Lord Dalhousie.

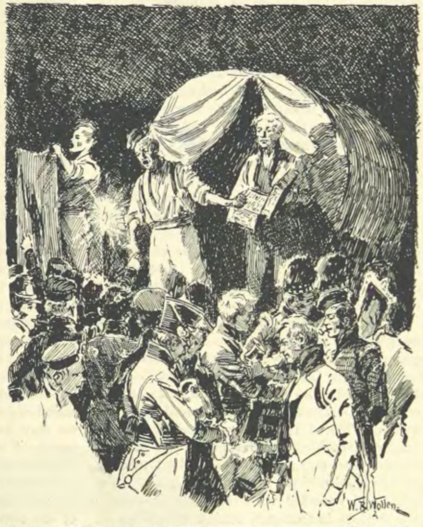
The aide instead encountered General Thomas Picton, whose 3rd Division was fairly aroused to enter the battle. The aide had no orders for Picton, who proceeded on his own initiative to attack the other bridges at Tres Puentes. Major General Lowry Cole, commanding the 4th Division, advanced as he heard the din of Picton's attack, and the combined weight of the 3rd and 4th Division assaults caused the first French defence line to sag into the second. Picton's division moved rapidly south of the river, and Kempt's brigade supported Dalhousie's late advance. The French nevertheless fought gamely, and dozens of artillery pieces opened fire on the advancing British while a counterattack, destined to fail, pitched into their exposed flank. During the melee, the 3rd Division absorbed 1,800 casualties.

By noon, however, the French were being assaulted from three directions and were inexorably being forced back as the 3rd, 4th, 7th, and Light Divisions merged into a line of battle, steadily advancing. The French paused around the village of Arinez but were soon forced to relinquish control there. They fell back toward the Zuazo ridgeline and the cover of artillery fire, but this position proved untenable as well as Marshal Jean-Baptiste Drouet, Comte d'Erlon, commanding the second line, and Gazan failed to cooperate in the defence.

As the afternoon wore on, Wellington hammered the French with coordinated attacks, particularly pressing the road directly approaching Vitoria, and French cohesion began to fray. At approximately 5pm, organised resistance to the British attacks came apart. Artillerymen abandoned their guns, and the infantry in the centre and left gave way, followed sometime later by the French right.

The field belonged to Wellington, but the pursuit of the defeated enemy left him fuming. Graham, who showed little initiative throughout the day, had been unable to cut the French line of retreat, allowing thousands of French soldiers to escape as two divisions of infantry under General Honoré Charles Reille made a heroic stand. The allied troops were also tired after long marches and a hard day of fighting.

More disconcerting, however, was the behaviour of many British soldiers as they entered Vitoria. The first British hussars reached the town around 7.30pm. The streets were crowded with the wagons bearing Joseph's loot. As the king was reported to have abandoned the wagons and fled on horseback, British soldiers turned from the task at hand and helped themselves to the booty.



"THE SOLDIERS HELD AN AUCTION THROUGH THE NIGHT" (p. 591).

After looting the wagon train abandoned by King Joseph Napoleon Bonaparte in his flight from the field at Vitoria, British soldiers conduct an impromptu auction of some of their booty. The Marquess of Wellington was appalled at the conduct of some of his troops after the battle was won.

An enraged Wellington later wrote, "We have in the service the scum of the earth as common soldiers. The 18th Hussars are a disgrace to the name of soldier."

Consequences of Vitoria

After order was restored, the cost of victory was assessed. The British suffered 3,164 killed and wounded, their Portuguese and Spanish allies another 1,584. The French had lost 8,000 casualties, while 150 artillery pieces were captured along with King Joseph's treasure.

The repercussions of the triumph were significant. Wellington's army was poised to renew the fighting, and soon his forces were invading France itself.

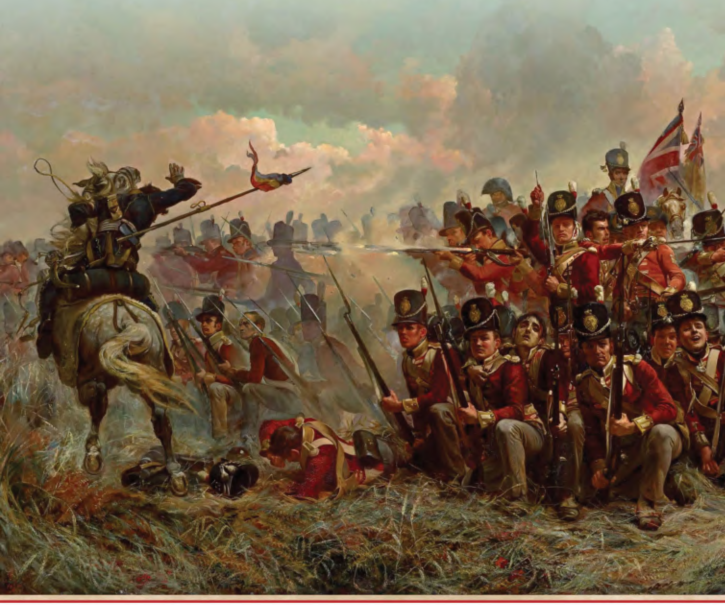
Napoleon remained crippled in central Europe following the retreat from Russia, and with the defeat in Spain it was apparent that his plans for dominance on the continent were unrealisable. When news of the victory reached the royal courts of Austria and Russia, both nations offered command of their armies to Wellington, and Austria mobilised immediately, declaring war on France.

In tandem with the Russian defeat, Vitoria was the beginning of the end of the French emperor's grand design. On the other hand, Wellington had burnished his reputation as a fine military commander and would go on to achieve even greater fame at Waterloo in 1815, where the ambitions of Napoleon were finally crushed forever.

In celebration of Vitoria, Ludwig van Beethoven was inspired to write his *Opus 91*, also known as *'Wellington's Victory'* and the *'Battle Symphony'*.

The Battle of Quatre Bras

Along with the nearby fight at Ligny, the crossroads prelude to Waterloo profoundly shaped the outcome of Napoleon Bonaparte's last conclusive battle.



The lamps blazed brightly at the Brussels estate. On this evening in June 1815, Charlotte Lennox, Duchess of Richmond, was entertaining. Officers in glittering uniforms and ladies in light, airy ball gowns floated across the dance floor.

Among those attending were the highest-ranking officers of Anglo-Dutch army recently raised and marched to the vicinity of the Belgian capital. Its commander-in-chief, Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington, arrived late. Amid the revelry, his mind was elsewhere, swirling in contemplation of a renewed military struggle – this time a fight to the finish.

Asked if the rumours were true, Wellington nodded. In March, the former scourge of Europe, Napoleon Bonaparte, had slipped the 'shackles' of exile on the island of Elba and returned to France. The portly French King Louis XVIII had fled, and Napoleon was once again emperor of France. Legions of his countrymen still held Napoleon in great esteem, and soldiers flocked to his flag of the newly constituted Armee du Nord, swelling its numbers to 130,000.

Wellington, hero of the Peninsular War that had concluded a year earlier, knew that the French army was in the field. He also knew that a decisive battle was in the offing. Asking for a map of the area, he retired to the library and surveyed the surrounding terrain. The French had taken Charleroi, just 13 miles south of Brussels, and Wellington declared, "Napoleon has humbugged me, by God; he has gained 24 hours' march on me!"

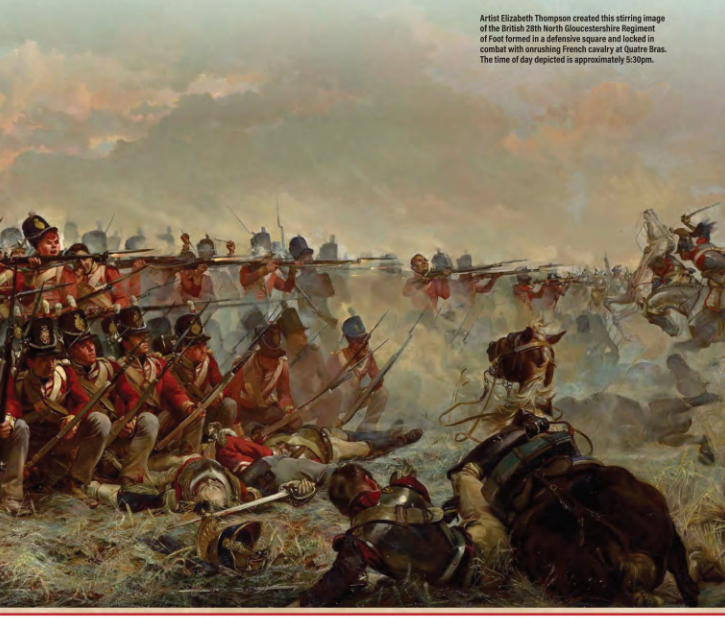
As the hour grew later, his officers slipped away from the gala, returning to their various commands.

Embarking on the 100 Days

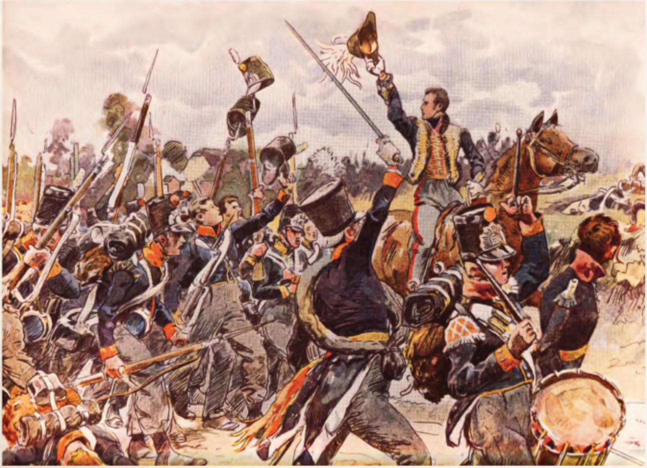
When Napoleon made landfall on the coast of France, only 1,000 men were under his command, but as his force grew stronger Louis XVIII sent Marshal Michel Ney, a former lieutenant of the deposed emperor who had since declared his loyalty to the French Bourbon king, to arrest the usurper. Ney vowed to bring Napoleon back to Paris in a cage.

However, when the two old comrades met on the road to the French capital, Ney changed his mind. The officer whom Napoleon had called the "bravest of the brave" was captivated. "Embrace me my dear Ney," Napoleon pleaded. "I am glad to see you. I want no explanations. My arms are ever open to receive you; for to me you are still the bravest of the brave."

Napoleon entered Paris on March 20, 1815, well aware that his former enemies would not tolerate his return. Already another anti-



Artist Elizabeth Thompson created this stirring image of the British 28th North Gloucestershire Regiment of Foot formed in a defensive square and locked in combat with onrushing French cavalry at Quatre Bras. The time of day depicted is approximately 5:30pm.



William, Prince of Orange, waves his hat to encourage Dutch infantrymen in their charge against the French at Quatre Bras. The allied army, under the command the Duke of Wellington, successfully defended the Belgian crossroads on June 16, 1815.

French alliance was taking shape. Britain, Prussia, Austria, Russia, the Netherlands, Hanover, Nassau, and Brunswick were fielding armies that would eventually approach a half million in number. The military might of the Seventh Coalition was expected to invade France and crush Napoleon once and for all.

However, Napoleon did not intend to play into allied hands. He knew that raising large numbers of troops and coordinating their movements would require considerable time. Therefore, he determined to assume the offensive and strike a pre-emptive blow while the odds were more in his favour. The nearest allied armies were the Anglo-Dutch under Wellington and the Prussian, led by Field Marshal Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher, in Belgium.

These armies were separated by some distance, and the quality of their troops was somewhat questionable. Wellington commanded 92,000 soldiers, the heart of his fighting force veteran British troops numbering roughly 28,000. The remainder included Dutch soldiers under William, Prince of Orange, and troops from the Kingdom of Hanover and the Duchies of Nassau and Brunswick, some of them just recently recruited, ill equipped and without extensive training. Blücher's Prussian army numbered more than 130,000, and a smouldering hatred of Napoleon drove the aggressive but elderly field marshal to bring on a decisive engagement.

Napoleon devised a simple but brilliant plan to drive a wedge between Wellington and Blücher, a strong salient that would prevent their mutual support, and defeat the allied armies in detail. As long as they were unable to join forces, his own veteran Armee du Nord would smash one enemy and then turn and deal with the other.

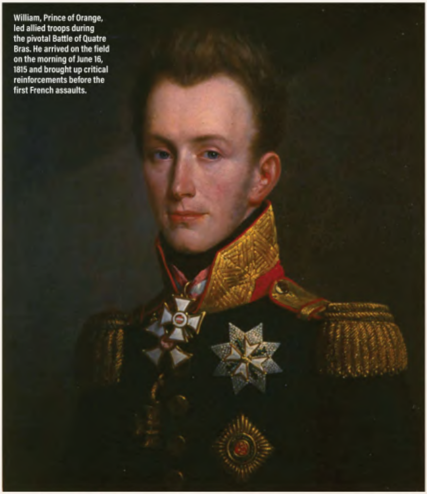
To the Crossroads

The Armee du Nord began crossing the Belgian frontier at the River Sambre before dawn on June 15. The II Corps, under General Honore Charles Reille, and the supporting I Corps of General Jean-Baptiste Drouet, Comte d'Erlon, pushed elements of the Prussian I Corps out of Charleroi. The road to Brussels lay open, virtually undefended.

Napoleon summoned Ney to his headquarters and ordered his trusted subordinate to take command of the I and II Corps, reinforced by light cavalry of his Imperial Guard and the III Cavalry Corps, including veteran cuirassiers under the capable command of General Francois Etienne de Kellermann, 2nd Duke of Valmy. Ney was to vanquish whatever resistance he might encounter and "take up a position at Quatre Bras."

Ney was received enthusiastically by his men, who shouted, "Here's Redhead!" and his left wing of the Armee du Nord included 50,000 soldiers. Blücher was expected to advance from the east. Ney was informed that he simply needed to hold Wellington at bay until Napoleon and the bulk of the army defeated the Prussians and turned westward. Then the full weight of the Armee du Nord would destroy Wellington.

Quatre Bras, which translates literally as 'Four Arms', was a farming hamlet at the junction of the Nivelles-Namur road and the Charleroi-Brussels road about 10 miles north of Charleroi. Holding the crossroads would surely prevent Wellington from joining Blücher, and Napoleon expected to contact the Prussians near the town of Ligny within 24 hours.



William, Prince of Orange, led allied troops during the pivotal Battle of Quatre Bras. He arrived on the field on the morning of June 16, 1815 and brought up critical reinforcements before the first French assaults.

Caution and Consternation

Wellington considered his options, weighing intelligence reports that Napoleon was in fact executing a wide flanking manoeuvre in the west toward Mons. Such a movement would place the Anglo-Dutch lines of communication with Britain in peril and possibly sever routes of supply from the English Channel ports. On June 15, further news of French movements trickled in, but their language was inconclusive. Blücher had urged Wellington to move east, even as the Prussian army advanced toward Ligny and the gap between the two allied forces widened. However, Wellington waited a while longer, sending cavalry toward Ghent and posting the II Corps of General Rowland Hill near the River Dender. He further ordered Prince William of Orange and the I Corps to move toward Nivelles.

Amid these manoeuvres, Major General Jean Victor de Constant Rebecque, chief of staff to the Prince of Orange, was at Gennape, three miles from Quatre Bras. He realised that the situation was precarious as Ney pressed toward the crossroads, and soon the 2nd Brigade, 2nd Netherlands Division, under Prince Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar, was ordered to occupy Quatre Bras. The brigade drew up around the village at 2pm on June 15. Rebecque had received the order from Wellington to concentrate his I Corps at Nivelles, but recent events had convinced him that the French intended to hurl a strong attack at Quatre Bras. A movement to Nivelles would only widen the dangerous gap between the Anglo-Dutch and Prussian armies. Rebecque decided to disobey Wellington's order and defend Quatre Bras.

By 3pm, Marshal Ney reached the II Corps command post at Gosselies roughly seven miles south of Quatre Bras. With the sun still high in the sky, Ney rode forward on the Brussels road to Frasnes with the Guards Light Cavalry Division close behind. Reaching the summit of a nearby hill at about 5.30pm, the French horsemen immediately heard cannon boom and muskets crackle. A battalion of Nassau troops and a battery of horse artillery had deployed down the Charleroi-Brussels road. These soldiers delivered brisk small arms fire, but when two squadrons of the 2nd Light Horse Regiment of Lancers, the famed 'Red Lancers', rode around Frasnes in an attempt to turn their flank, they fell back to the thick forest of the Bois de Bossu.

The Nassau troops, detached from Saxe-Weimar's command, then retired to Quatre Bras, where the entire 2nd Brigade waited. The French cavalry commander, General Pierre David de Colbert-Chabanais, was reluctant to charge the crossroads when confronted by Saxe-Weimar's 4,500 soldiers and a six-gun artillery battery and retired down the road beyond Frasnes.

Ambiguous Orders?

Although Napoleon and Marshal Ney knew one another well, the momentum of events on June 15 and Ney's hurried assumption of command of the left wing of the Armee du Nord created a measure of confusion as the opposing armies brushed one another. Historians have often pointed to Ney's lack of initiative that day as a major contributing factor in Napoleon's eventual defeat at Waterloo three days later. However, the situation was quite fluid, and the language of Napoleon's order of the day was not necessarily so explicit that Ney clearly understood the urgency of taking Quatre Bras.

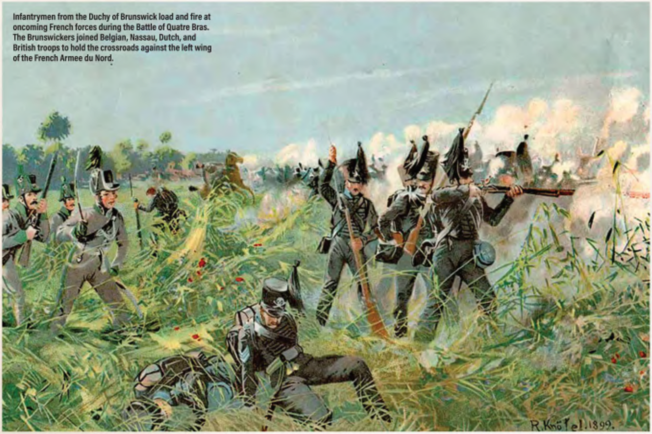
At the same time, Ney's entire force had not massed for a general engagement, and much of his infantry was strung out for miles along the road between Charleroi and Frasnes. With a couple more hours of daylight, he might have assembled enough troops to sweep past Frasnes and take Quatre Bras at nightfall, but the task of organising an attack involving thousands of soldiers just off the march appeared daunting. Ney chose to delay his attack until the next day.

PICTON & PRINCIPLE

General Thomas Picton, whose timely arrival with his 5th Division helped Wellington and the allied army win the day at Quatre Bras, was seriously wounded in the hip on June 16, 1815 but disclosed the injury only to a servant, seeking no medical aid. At about 3:30 in the afternoon on the field at Waterloo two days later, he exhorted his men, "Charge! Charge! Hurrah! Hurrah!" Moments later, he was struck down, a musket ball piercing his temple.

Picton was the highest-ranking officer killed at Waterloo, and in death was proclaimed a national hero. A monument honouring him was later erected at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. However, he carried with him the stain of an earlier involvement with the slave trade, profiting personally while serving as governor of Trinidad. He had become known as the 'Tyrant of Trinidad', advocating torture as a means for his small military command to maintain control of the local population.

In 1803, Picton had been tried and convicted for allowing the torture of a 14-year-old 'mulatto' girl. The conviction was later overturned as Picton argued that Trinidad was a Spanish possession at the time, and Spanish law allowed torture.


R.Knötel.1899.

Infantrymen from the Duchy of Brunswick load and fire at oncoming French forces during the Battle of Quatre Bras. The Brunswickers joined Belgian, Nassau, Dutch, and British troops to hold the crossroads against the left wing of the French Armee du Nord.

The battlefield of Quatre Bras resembled a triangle with the intersection at its apex. In the centre, the farmstead of Gemioncourt, including a large house with several outbuildings and a courtyard surrounded by brick walls, offered a strong anchor for defence. Through the middle of the battlefield, the Charleroi-Brussels road ran in the midst of undulating hills and dales with fields of head-high barley, rye, wheat, and corn providing considerable concealment. To the southeast, the Nivelles-Namur road trailed past the village of Piraumont toward Ligny and the Prussian army, while the dense Bois de Bossu extended some distance to the southwest.

The Prince of Orange and General Hendrik Georges, Baron Perponcher-Sedlnitzky, commander of the 2nd Netherlands Infantry Division, arrived at Quatre Bras just before daybreak with more troops, and the surrounding terrain prevented the French from accurately gauging the strength of their initial opposition near the crossroads. Only about 8,000 allied soldiers were in position early on June 16.

Manoeuvre and Mass

Wellington's reputation preceded him at Quatre Bras. Several French generals had fought against him during the Peninsular War, and they well remembered his use of deception, hidden troops waiting until the last moment and then revealing themselves to devastating effect. Such uncertainty added to Ney's burden of command on the morning of June 16.

Had the 'bravest of the brave' acted decisively, a rapid attack with the roughly 19,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry at his disposal would surely have overwhelmed the small, allied contingent at Quatre Bras, but Ney displayed no real sense of urgency to do so. Orders were passed for the soldiers to start fires and cook breakfast. Ney then sent a message by courier to Napoleon, who was preparing to attack the Prussians at Ligny, advising that the enemy was massing at Quatre Bras.

Napoleon, perhaps having believed that the crossroads was already occupied, dashed off a reply: "Concentrate the corps of Counts Reille and d'Erlon and that of Count Valmy, who is just marching to join you. With these forces you must engage and destroy all enemy forces that present themselves."

Reille's II Corps arrived in the vicinity of Quatre Bras around noon, but Ney waited two more hours before launching his assault on the crossroads. D'Erlon's corps was still some distance away, fated to play no significant role in the battle.

Meanwhile, Wellington arrived at Quatre Bras about 10am. Assessing the situation, he took advantage of Ney's gift of time and ordered the 5th Division, under General Thomas Picton, and the Duke of Brunswick's corps to move toward the looming engagement.

Wellington also rode to the Windmill of Bussy on the morning of the June 16 to confer with Blücher. The allied commanders watched Napoleon's main force concentrating against the Prussian positions at Ligny, and Wellington pledged to come to Blücher's aid if the French were not opposing him in strength around Quatre Bras. However, as Wellington rode back toward the crossroads the drama there was already unfolding.

The Fight at Quatre Bras

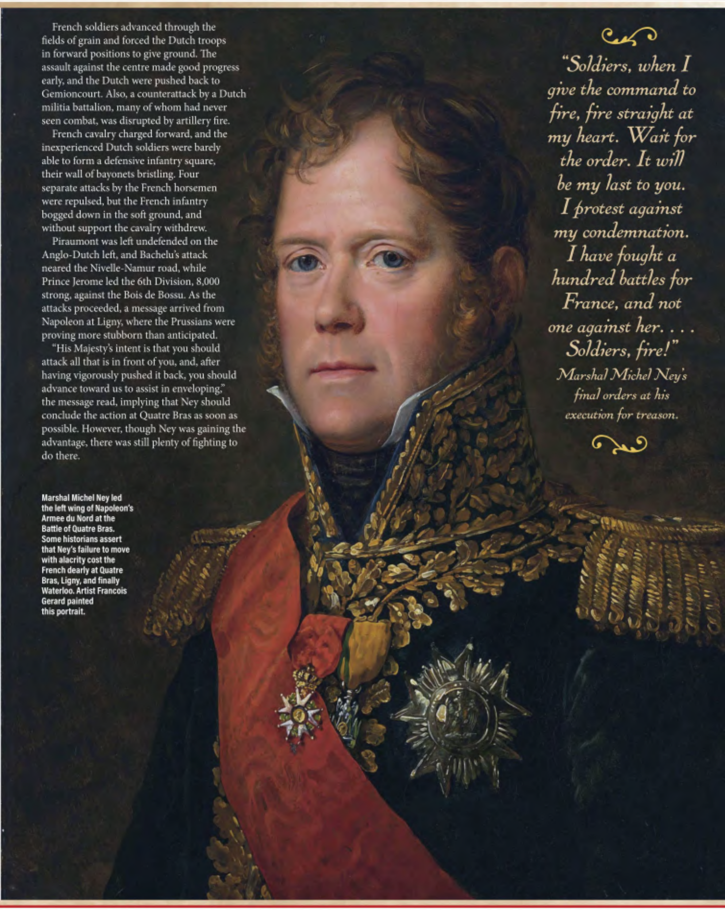
At long last, French artillery began to boom, and at 2pm the infantry stepped off in three columns. Ney intended to capture Quatre Bras without the support of d'Erlon's division and perhaps even march on to Brussels if the situation at Ligny was favourable. The 9th Infantry Division, led by General Maximilian Sebastian, Comte Foy, took the centre astride the Charleroi- Brussels road, while on the right the 5th Division, under General Gilbert Désiré Joseph Bachelu, was to capture Piraumont and then advance on Quatre Bras. On the left, Prince Jerome Bonaparte, younger brother of Napoleon, was to take Pierrepont farm with his 6th Division and then sweep the enemy from the Bois de Bossu in a decisive flank attack that would secure the crossroads.

French soldiers advanced through the fields of grain and forced the Dutch troops in forward positions to give ground. The assault against the centre made good progress early, and the Dutch were pushed back to Gemioncourt. Also, a counterattack by a Dutch militia battalion, many of whom had never seen combat, was disrupted by artillery fire.

French cavalry charged forward, and the inexperienced Dutch soldiers were barely able to form a defensive infantry square, their wall of bayonets bristling. Four separate attacks by the French horsemen were repulsed, but the French infantry bogged down in the soft ground, and without support the cavalry withdrew.

Piraumont was left undefended on the Anglo-Dutch left, and Bachelu's attack neared the Nivelle-Namur road, while Prince Jerome led the 6th Division, 8,000 strong, against the Bois de Bossu. As the attacks proceeded, a message arrived from Napoleon at Ligny, where the Prussians were proving more stubborn than anticipated.

"His Majesty's intent is that you should attack all that is in front of you, and, after having vigorously pushed it back, you should advance toward us to assist in enveloping," the message read, implying that Ney should conclude the action at Quatre Bras as soon as possible. However, though Ney was gaining the advantage, there was still plenty of fighting to do there.



Marshal Michel Ney led the left wing of Napoleon's Armee du Nord at the Battle of Quatre Bras. Some historians assert that Ney's failure to move with alacrity cost the French dearly at Quatre Bras, Ligny, and finally Waterloo. Artist Francois Gerard painted this portrait.

> *"Soldiers, when I give the command to fire, fire straight at my heart. Wait for the order. It will be my last to you. I protest against my condemnation. I have fought a hundred battles for France, and not one against her. . . . Soldiers, fire!"*
>
> *Marshal Michel Ney's final orders at his execution for treason.*

Prince Jerome plunged into the tangle of the Bois de Bossu but found the going difficult in the face of stiff resistance and the thick woods. He was wounded slightly when a bullet slapped into his sword scabbard and left a large bruise. Finally, after quite a brawl the French controlled the wood with the exception of the northern edge.

Foy's infantry maintained its advance in the centre and forced the Dutch to abandon Gemioncourt, even after the Prince of Orange, waving his hat to encourage the troops, led a spirited counterattack while a regiment of Dutch hussars rode into the melee. Sabres crashed, muskets fired, and men fell as the French threw the counterattack into disorder. The Prince of Orange barely escaped capture, slipping from the grasp of several French cavalrymen and reaching the safety of an infantry square formed by the 7th Belgian Line Battalion.

Meanwhile, French cavalry had advanced nearly to Quatre Bras itself, but they were overextended and vulnerable without infantry support. The 5th Belgian Light Dragoons, many of its officers veterans of earlier campaigns fighting alongside Napoleon, charged toward their former comrades, and fought gamely. However, the arrival of the 5th French Lancers nearly overwhelmed the Belgians, and they disengaged. At this juncture, victory was within Ney's grasp as his infantry pressed forward.

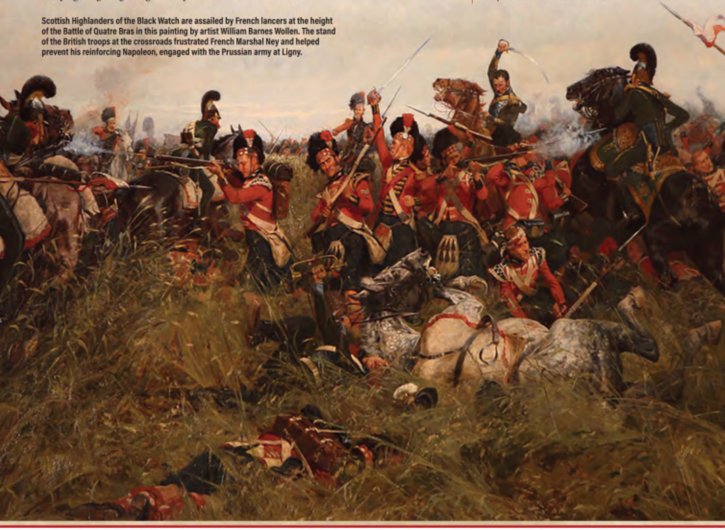
Wellington was just returning from his meeting with Blücher and found the situation desperate. Astride his famous stallion, Copenhagen, he raced toward the Nivelle-Namur road and caught a glimpse of scarlet advancing through the grain fields. The kilted 92nd Regiment of Foot (Gordon Highlanders), the vanguard of Picton's 5th Division, had reached the field. The Highlanders took positions with fixed bayonets in a ditch alongside the road.

At that moment, Friedrich Wilhelm, Duke of Brunswick, led his hussars in a desperate charge. French infantry replied with a fusillade of musketry, and the brave Brunswickers were struck down in heaps, the duke himself mortally wounded, a bullet in his stomach. As the forward Dutch infantry line began to falter, Wellington remained in the open and was nearly captured by French chasseurs.

Although the story may be apocryphal, it is said that Wellington shouted, "92nd lie down!" And as the Gordon Highlanders obliged, Copenhagen leaped surely beyond their bayonets, carrying the commander to safety.

Great numbers of French chasseurs continued their assault, and the 42nd Highlanders (Black Watch) emerged from a field of rye with orders to fix bayonets and form a defensive square. As the movement was executed, the 3rd Battalion was caught in the open. French infantry pursued retreating allied soldiers, and enemy lancers were riding hard. The square was formed, but the Black Watch paid a terrible price as the French lancers bowled into them. The Black Watch commander, Sir Robert Macara, was killed by a lance through his chin.

Wellington stood firm, bringing up the 28th North Gloucestershire Regiment of Foot to bolster the wounded Black Watch and ordering the Gordon Highlanders to hold their fire until the enemy reached roughly 30 paces from their line. On Wellington's command, the Highlanders loosed a devastating volley, taking down men and horses like a giant scythe. The 28th blazed away, and the French reeled.

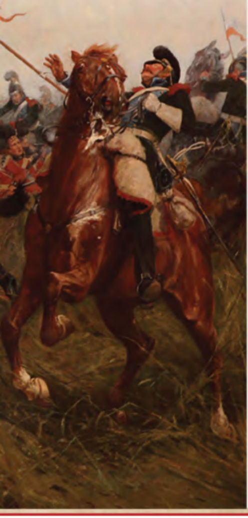


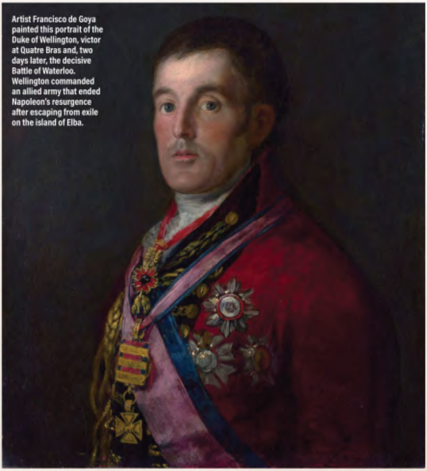
Scottish Highlanders of the Black Watch are assailed by French lancers at the height of the Battle of Quatre Bras in this painting by artist William Barnes Wollen. The stand of the British troops at the crossroads frustrated French Marshal Ney and helped prevent his reinforcing Napoleon, engaged with the Prussian army at Ligny.

Ney was furious when he received Napoleon's afternoon message. The intensity of the fighting at Quatre Bras was growing, and d'Erlon still had not arrived. In fact, d'Erlon had been redirected by order of Napoleon and was actually marching toward Ligny to assist there. D'Erlon dispatched his chief of staff, General Victor-Joseph Delcambre, to Ney to explain the change of orders and Ney was dumbfounded when he received the news.

Angrily, Ney sent the young aide who had brought Napoleon's most recent message back to Ligny, blurting, "Tell the emperor what you have seen here!" He further ordered Delcambre to return to d'Erlon, countermanding the order from Napoleon, and directing d'Erlon to Quatre Bras with all haste. When Delcambre brought Ney's order to d'Erlon, the I Corps was already on the outskirts of Ligny. On the horns of a dilemma, d'Erlon did turn west toward Quatre Bras, eight miles distant. Thus, an entire French corps marched to no result that day.

Later in the afternoon, Napoleon sent yet another communication to Ney spurring him to act swiftly and join the battle at Ligny. The message concluded, "The fate of France is in your hands." Locked in a major engagement, Ney was compelled to act decisively. He ordered Kellermann's cavalry, led by two battalions of cuirassiers, their helmets and breastplates gleaming in the sunlight, to charge the centre of the allied line.





Artist Francisco de Goya painted this portrait of the Duke of Wellington, victor at Quatre Bras and, two days later, the decisive Battle of Waterloo. Wellington commanded an allied army that ended Napoleon's resurgence after escaping from exile on the island of Elba.

The order was impetuous. Kellermann was incredulous. But he rode forward shouting, "Charge at the gallop!" The horsemen were greeted with a steady fire from the British 5th Brigade, consisting of the 30th, 33rd, 69th, and 73rd Regiments of Foot. While most of the British infantry had formed squares before the French reached them, the 69th apparently had its order countermanded in the confusion and remained in line formation. The French cuirassiers fell on them, wreaking havoc. The regimental colour bearer was wounded 23 times but managed to hold onto the treasured emblem. The king's colours were lost as the survivors of the 69th scrambled among their comrades of the 30th, which then withdrew.

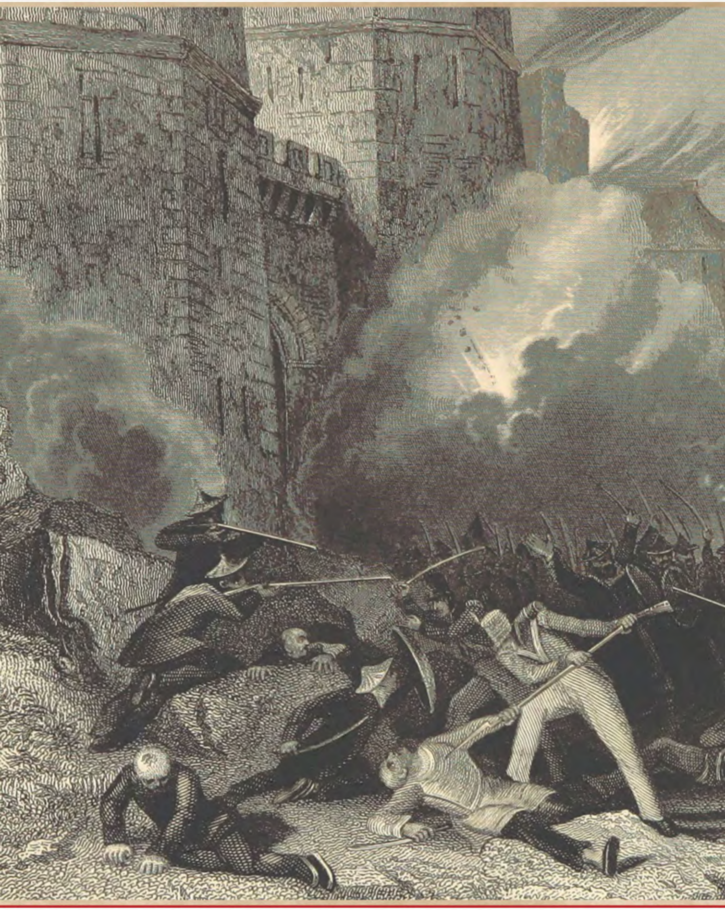
For a fleeting moment, Kellermann and his cuirassiers actually held the vital crossroads; but they were soon assailed by cannon and musket fire and driven back. Kellermann lost his horse and escaped astride the stirrups of two of his riders. As dusk began to settle, Ney had shot his offensive bolt. His troops were bloodied and battered. Wellington's ranks, on the other hand, had swelled to 36,000, and he assumed the offensive, ordering the British Foot Guards to clear the Bois de Bossu. This was accomplished, and the French were forced to retreat all along their line – returning to their morning starting point.

Consequences of Quatre Bras

Desultory musket fire petered out in the darkness, and it was clear that Wellington had won a tactical victory, holding Quatre Bras. Ney had prevented Wellington from coming to the aid of the Prussians at Ligny, but the Anglo-Dutch army had survived, subsequently relocating to defensive positions on the ridgeline of Mont-Saint-Jean at Waterloo. Allied losses at Quatre Bras amounted to 5,200 killed and wounded, while the French suffered 4,100 casualties.

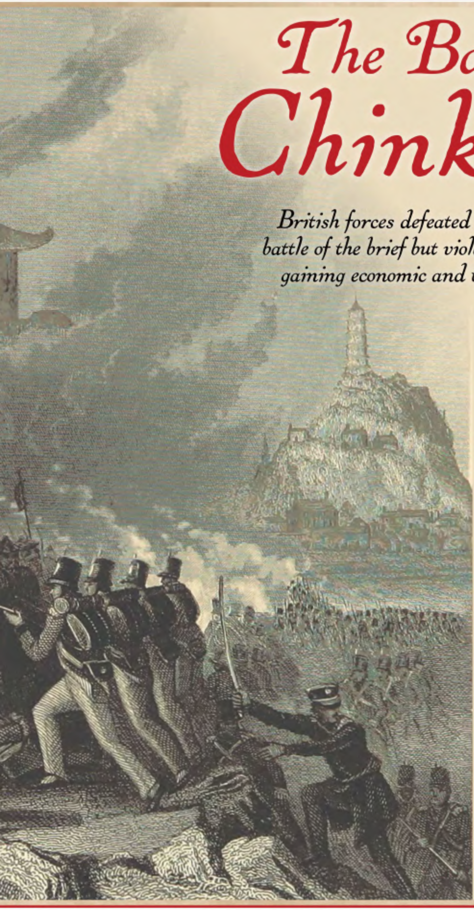
Although Napoleon had mauled two corps of Blücher's army at Ligny, he had failed to knock the Prussian army out of the war. The tenacious Blücher would then make good on his promise to come to Wellington's aid at Waterloo two days later.

The outcome of the famous Battle of Waterloo was, to a great extent, determined on the field at Quatre Bras. In these critical hours of manoeuvre and battle, Napoleon's dream of resurgent conquest vanished, and the 100 days were fated to end in final allied victory.



The Battle of Chinkiang

British forces defeated China in the climactic battle of the brief but violent First Opium War, gaining economic and territorial concessions.



British troops rush forward outside the walls of the fortress city of Chinkiang as Chinese defenders attempt to stem the tide. The British victory at Chinkiang in July 1842 contributed to the end of the First Opium War, and China made considerable trade concessions to end the hostilities.

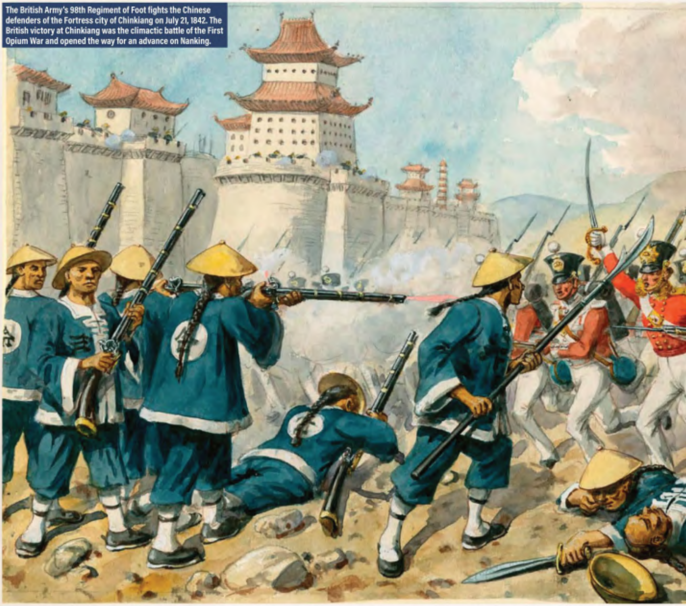
They seemed to be everywhere – in the cities, the villages, and across the rural landscape of the vastness of China. Millions of opium addicts, smoking the narcotic and lapsing into hours of listless gratification, had brought widespread troubles to the country.

The Daoguang Emperor, seventh of the Qing Dynasty, therefore, intended to end this scourge. In 1839, the emperor ordered Viceroy Lin Zexu to take steps to eradicate the opium trade. The decree was succinct and dramatic, for the government of China was aware of potential repercussions. Indeed, as Lin pursued his task a response from Great Britain was not long in coming.

Throughout history, wars have been fought for empire, for principle, and for the resolution of good versus evil. For lack of a better description, however, the First Opium War of 1839-1842 was fought to preserve profit, for the continuation of the lucrative opium trade that had brought immense wealth to the East India Company, the quasi-governmental trade colossus founded two centuries earlier that often exerted far more influence than the simple exchange of goods between countries.

Trade Versus Trade

For a time, the balance of trade between Britain and China was manageable. By the late 18th century, though, the British demand for Chinese exports such as tea, porcelain, and fine silks outstripped the Chinese appetite for the roughly manufactured cotton and woollen textiles imported from Britain to the port of Canton, where all foreign goods were required to land.



The British Army's 98th Regiment of Foot fights the Chinese defenders of the Fortress city of Chinkiang on July 21, 1842. The British victory at Chinkiang was the climactic battle of the First Opium War and opened the way for an advance on Nanking.

Since there was no appreciable market for British exports in China, the Chinese merchants began to require payment in silver. Much of the silver the British paid to the Chinese came from Spain, and when the Spanish sided with the upstart North American colonies during the revolutionary period of the 1770s-1780s, the ready supply of silver began to dry up.

The weight of the persistent trade imbalance, the scarcity of silver and the amount of the precious metal flowing out of Britain proved problematic, and the desire for redress prompted the East India Company to search for an equaliser. The solution was found in satisfying the growing Chinese taste for opium. The East India Company ruled much of the Indian subcontinent on behalf of the government in London, and opium from India was routinely imported to China. In turn, British merchants demanded payment in silver.

Derived from an otherwise innocuous poppy, the opium narcotic gained widespread use among the Chinese population. The imperial court in Peking issued restrictions on opium imports in 1780, and a thorough ban with the exception small amounts for medicinal purposes followed in 1796. The East India Company ignored these measures, and the brisk, illegal smuggling of opium into China continued.

The resourceful administration of the East India Company simply auctioned large quantities of opium to private traders in India. These traders sailed to China with their contraband cargo and secretly sold the opium to Chinese dealers. The East India Company rationalised that once the opium was sold, it was no longer their property; therefore, it had no responsibility for the smuggling operation. However, such absolution was shallow at best since the Indian opium traders operated under licenses the company issued. Crowning the flurry of profiteering, the British government collected taxes on the auction proceeds.

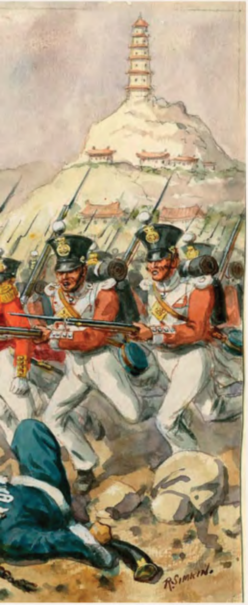
The Opium Road

By 1839, the Daoguang Emperor had determined that the continuing outflow of silver and the fraying of the fabric of Chinese society for which extensive use of opium was to blame required drastic action. Enter Lin Zexu.

The viceroy first attempted a diplomatic course, writing an open letter to Queen Victoria. "The Way of Heaven is fairness to all," he wrote. "It does not suffer us to harm others to benefit ourselves. Men are alike in this all the world over: that they cherish life and hate what endangers life…"

The queen never saw this appeal to end the opium trade on moral grounds.

Subsequently, Lin resorted to more assertive tactics. In May 1839, the Chinese compelled



Charles Elliot, Britain's chief superintendent of trade, to relinquish all opium stored in warehouses, called factories, in Canton as Lin sent soldiers to seize more than 20,000 chests of the narcotic. Chinese dealers were arrested for participating in the illegal trade, and Lin confiscated thousands of pipes used for smoking.

The British government was outraged, particularly when negotiations had failed, and the Chinese appeared obstinate. Perhaps a show of military force would produce favourable results – after all, the Chinese had never been thoroughly cooperative.

Operations on Behalf of Opium

Inevitably, when the Royal Navy presence in Chinese waters increased and British troops made landfall, skirmishes occurred. In early September 1839, a British cutter and armed schooner exchanged fire with Chinese junks and shore batteries at Kowloon after a dispute over the procurement of provisions.

In November, the frigate HMS *Volage* and the sloop HMS *Hyacinth* defeated a flotilla of 29 Chinese junks, sinking four, in the First Battle of Chuenpi. The action was prompted when Elliot attempted to calm the burgeoning tensions by issuing orders to blockade British shipping on the River Pearl. In response, a single merchant ship, *Royal Saxon*, under a bond concluded with Chinese officials not to sell opium, attempted to reach Canton with a cargo of cotton.

Volage and *Hyancith* tried to stop *Royal Saxon*, and when Admiral Guan Tianpei led the Chinese warships out of the harbour, they were blasted. Elliot's attempt to calm the situation had the opposite effect.

By January 1840, after the emperor issued a decree that no other European country trading with China should cooperate with Great Britain, an overwhelming sentiment for action gripped Parliament. Officials in India were instructed to assemble a punitive military expedition to deal with the Chinese.

An Unequal Struggle

The British military expedition arrived off Macao in mid-June 1840. Commodore James Bremer commanded the Royal Navy's China Squadron and its contingent of Royal Marines, while Major General Hugh Gough led the land forces of the British Army. Orders were to maintain a blockade of the River Pearl and proceed to the Chusan islands to demand their surrender. Once the islands were captured, a blockade of the River Yangtze and a show of strength from Royal Navy warships in the coastal waters of the Yellow Sea would be accompanied by a list of demands, including compensation for the losses suffered by merchants with the destruction of the Canton warehouses and rights to the use of an offshore island as a trading point, as well as the opening of additional Chinese ports to British trade.

After the surrender demand was refused, the most heavily fortified of the Chusan islands, Zhoushan, was attacked and Royal Navy warships destroyed a fleet of 12 junks. Following a heavy naval bombardment, British troops captured the city of Dinghai, a company of the 49th Regiment of Foot securing its main gate. Continuing its mission, the British force divided, heading to the Yellow Sea and up the Pearl toward Canton.

The recalcitrant Chinese dismissed the British demands, and on January 7, 1841, the forts of Chuenpi and Tycocktow at the strait of Humen blocked the military expedition. British warships promptly sank 11 junks, and the 26th Cameronian Regiment of Foot subdued the forts, suffering 38 casualties. The British victory convinced the Chinese authorities to negotiate, and 10 days later the Convention of Chuenpi ceded Hong Kong to Britain, reopened Canton to British trade, and secured reparations for British financial losses. Elliot was sacked, apparently for failing to exact enough concessions from the Chinese, and he was replaced by Sir Henry Pottinger. The emperor had Lin arrested for giving up too much.

Victory to Victory

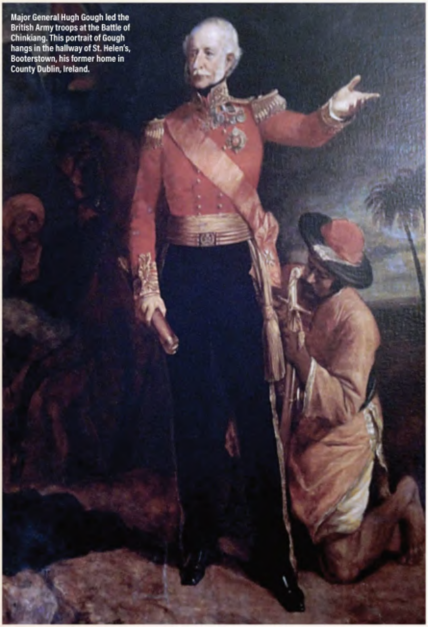
Hostilities hardly abated, and at the end of February the British captured other Chinese fortifications on the Pearl. By mid-March, they had taken Whampoa island, and a naval force sailed up the River Broadway, wreaking havoc with the destruction or capture of six Chinese strongpoints, nine junks, and 105 pieces of artillery.

During fighting in Canton, the British took control of their former warehouses and attempted to reopen trade. A Chinese counterattack disrupted the effort but after four days of fighting, the British retook the warehouses, and subsequently Canton fell on May 27, 1841. Before Pottinger arrived at Hong Kong in early August, Elliot had brokered another agreement with Lin's replacement, Yishan. However, the emperor refused to accept a peace deal, perhaps in the mistaken impression that his forces were actually winning the war.

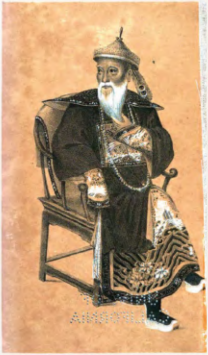
THE SECOND OPIUM WAR

From 1850 to 1864, the Qing Dynasty was beset by the Taiping Rebellion. Seizing opportunities to obtain further trade concessions from the embattled Chinese government, Britain and France found pretences for military action. After hostilities erupted in 1856, the Europeans marshalled forces and launched large-scale operations the following year. Canton was captured, and with the Treaties of Tianjin, signed in June 1858, the Chinese agreed to open more ports to European trade, lift restrictions on travel to the interior of their country, and allow greater influence from Christian missionaries. By the end of the year, an additional agreement legalised the opium trade, and the Europeans withdrew from Tianjin.

In June 1859, British and French diplomats headed up the River Hai toward Peking for the formal signing of the Tianjin treaties. However, Chinese fortifications blocked their passage. When the Europeans attempted to force their way upriver, they were repulsed in a bloody fight. Enraged, the British and French raised a much larger military expedition, destroyed the offending fortifications, seized Tianjin again, and proceeded to occupy Peking itself, putting the Qing emperor's summer palace to the torch and looting the city. The might of the British and French onslaught forced the Chinese to formally sign the Tianjin treaties and further to cede the southern Kowloon peninsula near Hong Kong to Britain.



Major General Hugh Gough led the British Army troops at the Battle of Chinkiang. This portrait of Gough hangs in the hallway of St. Helen's, Booterstown, his former home in County Dublin, Ireland.



On behalf of the Qing emperor, Viceroy Lin Zexu embarked on an aggressive campaign to eradicate the opium trade in China after an appeal to Queen Victoria to end the trade on moral grounds never reached the monarch. Lin was later removed from office and arrested.

The unbroken string of British military victories continued throughout the autumn of 1841 and the following spring. Moving north, the British took the city of Amoy and once again captured the Chusan islands, which had previously been returned to the Chinese. On October 10 the port of Chinhai was captured with the loss of three British soldiers killed and 16 wounded. Three days later, the city of Ningpo was occupied without opposition. In March 1842, the Chinese attempted to retake Ningpo but were easily repulsed.

On May 18, 1842 the port of Chapu was taken against surprisingly stiff resistance. The British bombarded Chinese positions with rockets and in the spirited fight lost nine killed and 55 wounded, among them Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas Tomlinson, commander of the 18th (Royal Irish) Regiment of Foot. The 38-year-old Tomlinson died during an assault on a religious building, which the British referred to as a Joss House, and Gough praised the heroism of the officer, who was later buried at sea.

Further operations, coordinated by Gough and Admiral Sir William Parker, commander of Royal Navy forces in China, led to the capture of Shanghai, following the June 16, 1842 Battle of Woosung. A month later, the British expeditionary force sortied up the Yangtze.

Storming Chinkiang

The climactic battle of the one-sided First Opium War occurred on July 21, 1842 with the storming of the fortress city of Chinkiang, which protected the approaches to the city of Nanking, 300 miles up the Yangtze from Shanghai. In mid-July, British warships had gathered near Chinkiang to sever access from the Yangtze to the Grand Canal, the main waterway transporting grain from southern China to population centres in the north. The capture of Chinkiang would sever this lifeline and threaten the north with famine.

Gough's land forces, 6,900 strong, included British and Madras troops, while the defending Chinese were estimated between 3,000 and 4,000 Mongol and Manchu fighters of the Qing Dynasty's Green Standard Army, led by Commander Hai Ling. About 2,300 Manchu 'bannermen', called Tartars by the British, were inside the fortress proper along with their families. Many of the Chinese soldiers were armed with obsolescent matchlock muskets or only spears and swords.

Gough launched his attack at daybreak on July 21, the 2,300 troops of the 1st Brigade coming ashore at Jinshian Highlands and assaulting Chinese positions outside the walls of Chinkiang. These Chinese troops were exhausted after marching through the night and rapidly gave way when no support from within the walls of Chinkiang materialised.

Gough ordered Major General James Schoedde's 2nd Brigade, which included the 55th (Westmoreland) Regiment of Foot, under Major C. Warren, the 2nd and 6th Madras Native Infantry, and a company of the Madras Rifles, to attack the strongpoint at the northeast corner of the Chinkiang fortress. Landing at Beigu Mountain, north of the city, at 7am, Schoedde sent the 2nd Madras and Madras Rifles in a diversionary movement against the east wall, drawing Chinese troops away from the assault of the 55th Foot and the 6th Madras, which scaled the north wall with ladders at its northeast corner.

The main attack was initially unopposed, and two columns of attackers filtered into the city after engaging the few defenders atop the wall itself. Many defenders fell for the ruse and briefly exchanged fire with the Madras Rifles before realising their mistake and rushing back toward the northeast. The grenadiers of the 55th Foot led the main assault, making good progress, but were soon pinned down by Chinese musket fire.

Meanwhile, the 6th Madras fought its way to a heavily defended guardhouse that stood before the northeast gate. A fierce exchange of fire ensued, the British warships bombarding the guardhouse in support of the 6th, which finally gained entry, attacking some defenders with bayonets, shooting others at close range, and then using rifles as clubs.

Forcing open the northeast gate, the 6th allowed the 2nd Madras inside and then rushed to the support of the grenadiers of the 55th Foot, still taking heavy fire from a two-level strongpoint on the north wall. Once they were joined by the rest of their regiment and the Madras troops, the stout grenadiers hurtled toward the strongpoint, seizing it amid slashing swords and hand-to-hand combat. They fought another four hours before reaching the west gate, where the 3rd Brigade, commanded by Major General Bartley, was engaged.

Bartley's brigade, including the 18th and 49th (Hertfordshire) Regiments of Foot and the 14th Madras, attacked toward the west gate, occupying several buildings outside the fortress, and taking heavy fire from the Qing troops along the wall. A contingent of 200 Royal Marines, landed from an adjacent portion of the Grand Canal, scaled the wall as the 3rd Brigade unleashed strong covering fire.

This section of the fortress was constructed with both outer and inner gates separated by 500-yards of open ground. From positions above, Qing musketeers could possibly rain steady fire on the attackers. When sappers blew the outer west gate open, the 3rd Brigade charged through while the Marines cleared the defenders from above. Although they expected strong resistance, as they approached the interior gate, the men of the 3rd Brigade were greeted by the 55th Foot, which had already secured the entryway. Chinkiang had fallen.

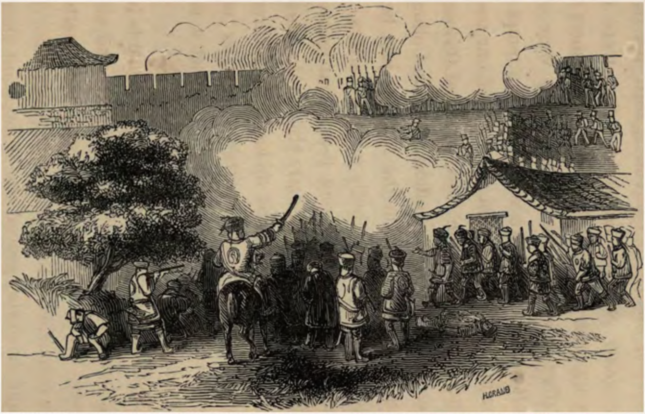
Realising that they were defeated, many of the Chinese committed suicide, some after killing their wives and children. When Gough entered Chinkiang, he was appalled by the grim scene. British losses numbered 34 killed and 107 wounded, while the defenders suffered more than 1,000 casualties.

Aftermath of Chinkiang

With the loss of grain transportation via the Grand Canal and the British advancing toward Nanking, the Qing emperor finally sought peace. The treaty of Nanking, signed August 29, 1842, committed the Chinese to pay further financial reparations for opium stores lost at Canton, while five additional ports, Guangzhou, Ningpo, Shanghai, Amoy, and Foochow, were opened up to European trade. The treaty was silent on the topic of opium.

In the wake of Chinkiang, the Qing Dynasty suffered a tremendous loss of prestige. China's defeat in the First Opium War is seen by many historians as the beginning of a period known in China to this day as the 'Century of Humiliation'. For decades to come, the Qing Dynasty would be subjected to a series of detrimental treaties that enhanced European influence along with the loss of substantial territory to Japan and Russia near the end of the 19th century.

By the mid-20th century, China had been wracked by war and economic exploitation, giving rise to the civil war that brought the communist regime of Mao Tse Tung to power. Today, modern China, its foreign policy still tinged with bitterness, continues to grapple with its past, and much of the current political and economic rivalry that exists may trace its origins to the pernicious opium trade.



Chinese commanders attempt to rally some of the nearly 4,000 troops defending Chinkiang against the attacking British forces, seen in the distance scaling the fortress walls. As the battle drew to a close, many Chinese committed suicide, some of them after killing their entire families.

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The Battle of Kambula

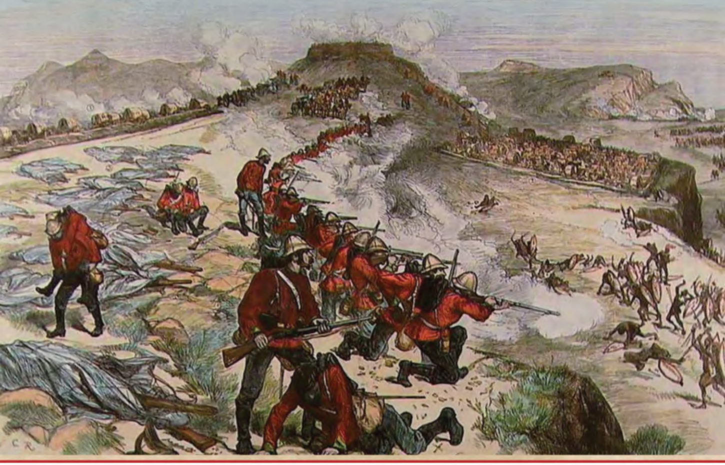
After a series of setbacks and outnumbered 10 to one, a British force defeated the army of King Cetshwayo in the turning point of the Zulu War of 1879.

"Don't run away Johnny! We want to speak to you! We're the boys from Isandlwana!" The Zulu warriors laughed and jeered as the British horsemen beat a hasty retreat. Thousands of native Africans had rallied in an attempt to repel the British invasion of their homeland, and thus far they had been quite adept in the endeavour.

January 1879 had been a dismal month for the British army, and the conduct of the Zulu War verged on an exercise in futility. On January 22, 1,300 men were massacred at the Battle of Isandlwana in one of the greatest blows to British imperial prestige of the 19th century. The disaster at Isandlwana had been followed by the heroic stand of 150 soldiers of the 24th Regiment of Foot and a few others at Rorke's Drift that held on grimly against nearly 5,000 Zulu attempting to wipe out that British lodgement as well. To make matters worse, another British contingent, under Colonel Charles Pearson, was besieged in the south at Eshowe.

Then, in March, a British supply train had been stranded by heavy rains and the rising waters of the River Intombe, near Luneburg

British soldiers maintain their positions on the firing line and unleash a sheet of flame against the onrushing Zulu at the Battle of Kambula on March 29, 1879. Vastly outnumbered, the British and allied troops held their ground at Kambula and won a significant victory.



These warriors of the Natal Native Contingent pose for a photograph in 1879. Indigenous troops loyal to Britain, the Natal Native Contingent fought with distinction at the Battle of Kambula and elsewhere during the Zulu War.

in the north of Zululand. At least 500 Zulu warriors fell upon the escort, under Captain David Moriarty, and slaughtered it to a man, leaving as many as 80 dead before turning to pillage the wagons.

And so, here stood Colonel Henry Evelyn Wood's command of just over 2,000 British troops and allied Natal Native and Boer irregulars, laagered at Kambula. Already a day before, on March 28, this force of Her Majesty Queen Victoria's army had tasted defeat. Ordered to raid Zulu positions at nearby Hlobane Mountain in retribution for the Intombe massacre, and to draw the enemy away from an effort to relieve Eshowe, British and allied cavalry had nearly been trapped and annihilated, escaping only by a hair's breadth with 225 casualties, including 17 British officers and 82 enlisted men.

Colonel Wood was well aware that the Zulu impi, or army, was nearby in force, and he did his best to prepare defences against the coming avalanche of enemy warriors armed with shields, short stabbing spears called assegai, and .45-caliber Martini-Henry rifles taken from the bodies of the dead British soldiers at Isandlwana.

How had Britain's foray into Zululand reached such a nadir? The most disciplined, professional land fighting force in the world was teetering on the brink of utter defeat.

Ambitious Expansion in Southern Africa

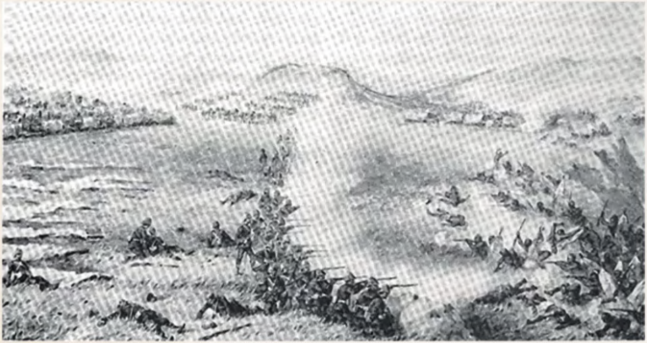
British imperialism, a relentless thirst for empire, had brought settlers to southern Africa in the early 19th century. The territory was home to native African peoples, and Dutch settlers, called Boers, were also in the region in numbers, lured by land and resources. In the mid-1860s, diamonds were discovered in the area north of Cape Town, and a surge of migration occurred.

By 1875, Britain's expansionist aims were becoming clearer. Lord Carnarvon, Secretary of State for the Colonies, had been prominent in the establishment of the Federation of Canada in 1867, and he was convinced that a similar arrangement might allow peaceful coexistence with the Boers. However, such overtures were rebuffed, and it appeared that the relationship with fellow Europeans might eventually sour. Still, first things first. Zululand stretched beyond British holdings in southern Africa, and its proud inhabitants had no desire to become subjects of a European monarch – they had a king of their own. They did, however, wish to be left alone.

Carnarvon nevertheless sowed the seeds of a war for empire, first naming Sir Bartle Frere as High Commissioner for Southern Africa and then charging Frere with the task of developing a pretext for an invasion of Zululand. The commissioner proved proficient at his craft, and a series of incidents took place that positioned British diplomats to pressure Zulu King Cetshwayo.

Two incidents involved wives of Zulu Chieftain Sihayo. In the company of other men, the women fled to British soil but were retrieved by family members, returned to Zulu territory, and then put to death in accordance with Zulu law. A third incident occurred when a surveyor employed by the British Colonial Engineer Department and an accompanying merchant were detained by the Zulu along the River Tugela, treated roughly, and then released.

Although Carnarvon's successor, Sir Michael Hicks Beach, warned in November 1878 that matters elsewhere in the Empire were deemed of considerably more importance and that Her Majesty's government did not favour an invasion of Zululand, Frere was, in a practical sense, beyond Beach's control. In December 1878, Frere proceeded apace, confronting Cetshwayo with an ultimatum that included terms intended to be unacceptable, such as the payment of reparations for slights against the British, disbanding the sizeable Zulu army within 30 days, and the handing over of Sihayo's sons and brother, who had taken vengeance on the wayward wives, to stand trial in a British court.



In the closing stages of the Battle of Kambula, British soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 13th Light Infantry drive Zulu warriors from the crest of a ravine and back into a trough, where they absorb heavy fire.

Diplomacy by Military Means

Within days of the Zulu rejection of Frere's ultimatum, the commissioner authorised Frederic Augustus Thesiger, 2nd Baron Chelmsford, to lead a military invasion of Zululand. Chelmsford was soon on the march, advancing in mid-January into the territory in three columns intent on crushing all resistance and eventually occupying the Zulu capital of Ulundi.

Through misfortune, poor tactical command, and Zulu resourcefulness, the centre column came to grief at Isandlwana. The desperate heroism at Rorke's Drift followed, and the litany of British misfortunes mounted. By the end of January, Wood's column was the only remaining appreciable British force in Zululand that could assist in salvaging the deteriorating situation.

Chelmsford marshalled a relief column to lift the siege at Eshowe and called upon Wood to provide a diversion that might draw off sufficient numbers of Zulu warriors to facilitate the march. Wood complied dutifully, and the partial result was the ignominious performance during the Battle of Hlobane Mountain on March 28. The next day, instead of going after the enemy, the Zulu tidal wave would come to Wood.

Kill or be Killed at Kambula

The British and allied defences at Kambula lay along a ridgeline and included a multi-sided laager formed by linking the force's wagons together, as was standard practice. A livestock enclosure, or kraal, was built along the southern slope of the ridge, while earthworks and trenches enclosed the entire area, and a stone redoubt was constructed on high ground to the north of the kraal. A parapet protected the 100 yards of ground between the kraal and the redoubt.

Wood's command included elements of several army units and irregular formations, such as the 11th Battery, 7th Brigade, Royal Artillery, 1st Battalion, 13th Light Infantry, 90th Perthshire Light Infantry, Frontier Light Horse, sappers of the Royal Engineers, 1st Squadron Mounted Infantry, Transvaal Rangers, Baker's Horse, Kaffrarian Rifles, Native Natal Horse, and the Border Horse. Wood placed six 7-pounder cannon to cover the northern front between the laager and the redoubt, two of them in the redoubt itself. A company of infantry held the kraal, and two others were posted within the redoubt; the remaining infantry were dispersed at various points within the laager.

The night of March 28 was restless, and the defenders of Kambula were roused from fitful sleep before sunrise. Quickly, the lodgement was prepared for the coming battle as extra ammunition was distributed and breakfast eaten. At 12.45pm, the great Zulu impi, numbering perhaps 25,000 warriors, was spotted moving southeast of the British positions. The warriors then formed into the classic Zulu horns and chest battle alignment, and the right horn circled to the north while the left horn and chest continued westward until positioned directly south.

The bugler sounded the alarm, and at 1.30 Wood ordered Lieutenant Colonel Redvers Henry Buller and 100 mounted troops to ride toward the right horn and bait the Zulu into an early attack. The order was executed, the horsemen proceeding within rifle range, dismounting, and firing a volley at the Zulu. The response was predictable. As the incensed warriors gave chase, Buller's men beat a hasty retreat, halting at times to fire additional volleys. When the riders had reached the safety of the laager and the Zulu approached within 300 yards, the posted 90th Light Infantry opened on the clear field of fire and the

A NATAL HERO

In the opening minutes of the Battle of Kambula, Lieutenant Colonel John Cecil Russell, an officer of the 12th Prince of Wales's Royal Lancers, commanded the 1st Squadron Mounted Infantry in the effort to lure the right horn of the Zulu army to attack. When the Zulu began rushing forward, Russell's horse became agitated and reared almost out of control. The officer was struggling to mount as the enemy closed.

Sergeant Major Learda of the Edendale Contingent, Natal Native Horse saw that the officer was in imminent danger and rushed back to his aid with a few other men. At the same time, Lieutenant Edward S. Browne of the Mounted Infantry rode up and steadied Russell's horse momentarily. Russell climbed up, but the horse bolted once again. Browne gave chase and finally brought the beast under control.

All of those involved reached safety, and Browne received the Victoria Cross for heroism. Learda was presented a Distinguished Conduct Medal, a second level award just below the Victoria Cross. But for his race, Learda might have received the Victoria Cross as well.

Zulu warriors such as this individual were fierce adversaries on the battlefield. Although often primitively armed, they were nevertheless courageous and earned the grudging respect of their British opponents during the Zulu War of 1879.

cannon boomed at the swarm of Zulu running headlong toward the perimeter. Canister ammunition, which turned the cannon into large shotguns, unleashed a hail of lead and blasted large swaths among the warriors, who melted away leaving scores of twisted corpses and their writhing wounded on the ground. By 2.15, the Zulu right horn had pulled back to the northeast.

Moments later, the Zulu centre and left horn attacked into a ravine below the redoubt. Emerging from this limited cover at about 3pm, they ran square into the concentrated rifle fire of two companies of the 13th Light Infantry and a single company of the 90th Light Infantry along the southern face while the six cannon positioned near the laager and in the redoubt barked steadily. At the kraal, about 150 men of the 1st Battalion, 13th Light Infantry were hard pressed by determined attacks from Zulu who had been bested at Rorke's Drift two months earlier. The attackers broke into the kraal, while small groups manoeuvred east and west, taking up positions among a cluster of huts and a garbage dump.

Hand-to-hand fighting occurred as the defenders of the kraal were hit from three sides. The pressure proved too great, and they retreated up the nearby slope toward the ridgeline and the relative safety of the laager. The commander at the kraal, Captain William Cox, was shot in the leg, and four soldiers were killed and seven wounded. Colour Sergeant Arthur Fricker was seriously wounded, and Private William Grosvenor rushed to his aid. Fricker was stunned and could not be moved, but Grosvenor stood by his sergeant, fighting the Zulu until he fell with a mortal wound. Fricker survived because of Grosvenor's selfless act.

More Zulu warriors advanced into the ravine and the kraal, only 50 yards from the redoubt. Wood realised the imminent danger and ordered 43-year-old Major Robert Henry Hackett to lead two companies of the 90th Light Infantry in a bayonet charge to push the enemy back. The ensuing assault dislodged the Zulu who had reached the upper edge of the ravine, and British soldiers took positions around the rim, pouring fire directly into the exposed Zulu in the ravine and into the kraal. The attack had succeeded, but Hackett was shot in the temple and blinded. Still, steady fire from the garbage dump and the kraal raked the two companies and casualties mounted to the point that Wood ordered a withdrawal.

The Zulu right horn regrouped and came on again at approximately 4.30, but artillery and rifle fire shredded the advance. They retreated in disorder, and the defenders of Kambula paused to deliver an exultant cheer.

The rally that followed broke the back of Zulu resistance and changed the course of the entire heretofore futile British offensive in minutes. A rapid deployment from the redoubt took the Zulu in the garbage dump under steady fire, while assaults drove the remaining warriors from the kraal as the 1st Battalion, 13th Light Infantry sallied from the laager on the right with two mule-drawn cannon belching fire in support. The Zulu began falling back all along the perimeter, and those that lagged near the kraal were bayoneted.

Shown in a coloured photograph from 1900, Colonel Evelyn Wood commanded the victorious British contingent at the Battle of Kambula. Although outnumbered, the British and their Natal and Boer irregular allies defeated the Zulu army, 25,000 strong, and the triumph proved to be a turning point of the Zulu War.

With grim determination, Wood then ordered the balance of his mounted troops to pursue the Zulu who were running. Lieutenant Colonel Buller, eager to avenge the embarrassment at Hlobane Mountain, exhorted his troopers to show no mercy, and they slashed at the warriors, striking them down. Captain Henry Cecil D'Arcy of the Frontier Light Horse shouted, "No quarter boys! And remember yesterday!"

Estimates of the Zulu killed just in the mad mounted flurry reach as high as 1,000, and as the Zulu fled, they left an estimated 2,000 casualties on the field. British and allied troops indeed took vengeance for Isandlwana and Hlobane Mountain, slaughtering Zulu wounded – at times with their own assegais. Reports of such atrocities reached London and caused some Britons to recoil from such a ruthless enterprise. Wood defended his men and denied the allegations. British losses at Kambula were 29 killed and 54 wounded.

Kambula was the turning point of the Zulu war.

War's Hinge of Fate

The stunning victory at Kambula was the turning point of the Zulu War. Chelmsford defeated the warriors again at Gingindlovu on April 2 and succeeded in relieving Pearson at Eshowe. In quick succession, these triumphs sapped the Zulu will to wage war. Cetshwayo sought peace negotiations, but Chelmsford's blood was up, and he refused. Instead, the British marched on to the Zulu capital and won the final victory of the Zulu War at Ulundi.

While there is no doubt that the Zulu War was one of conquest, the British effort to consolidate dominion in southern Africa had further consequences. The lingering question of relations with the Boers would later erupt in bloody warfare. The European influence in the region further fostered a turbulent future as prevailing notions of race and roles of dominance and subservience brought decades of unrest, persisting well into the 20th century.

Today, as historians analyse and the British people reflect upon the past, they do so amid the long shadow of the Zulu War, the implications of racism, the cloak of moral superiority, and the legacy of battles that shocked the world for their ferocity.

The Battle of Gingindlovu and the Siege of Eshowe

During the Zulu War, these victories renewed confidence in the prospects for satisfying British territorial ambitions and establishing hegemony in southern Africa.

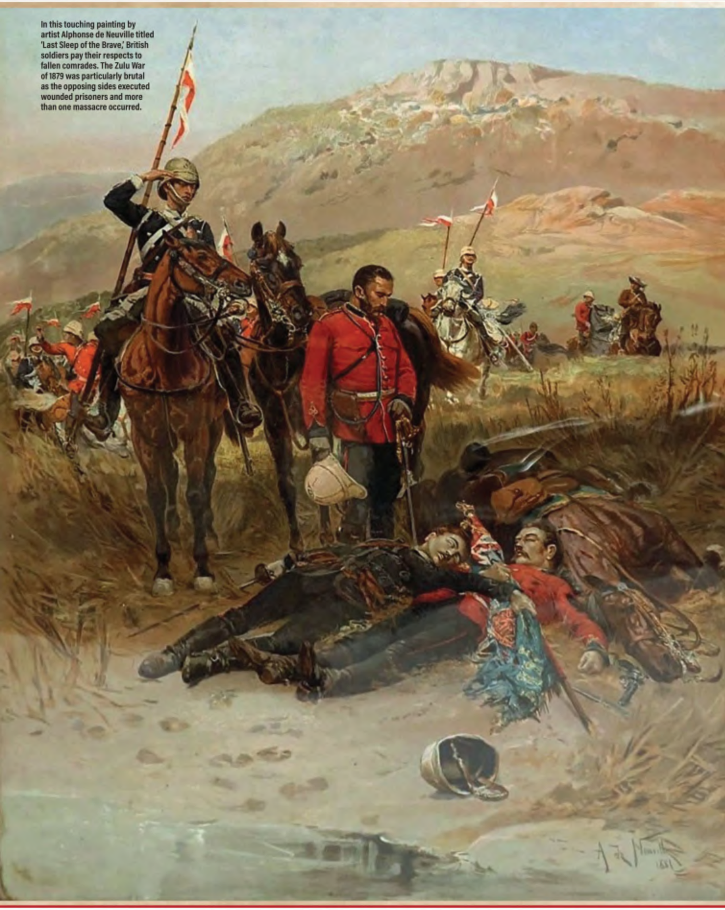
Cetshwayo, the last king of the Zulu, did not seek war with Britain. Rather, it was thrust upon him. Cetshwayo was deposed and then restored as a puppet ruler. He was later wounded during persistent unrest and died at Eshowe in February 1884.

They were brave, fierce – and primitive. While there was no doubt that the Zulu warriors of King Cetshwayo were sublime in their conduct, when the British guns fell silent on the morning of April 2, 1879, the ground was littered with the corpses of their dead while scores of their wounded writhed in agony.

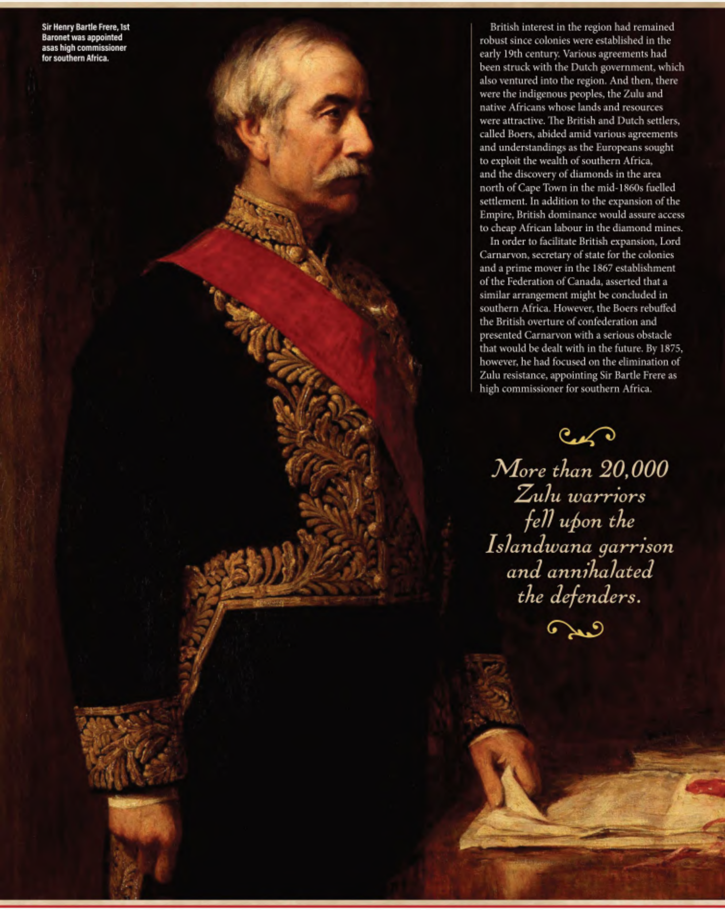
Although their courage was admirable, the Zulu had proven no match for the firepower of the British armed forces, and the Battle of Gingindlovu set the stage for the relief of the siege of Eshowe the next day, after two grim months of privations. Together, these victories, overshadowed by other better-known engagements of the Zulu War of 1879 such as Isandlwana, Rorke's Drift and Ulundi, gave impetus to a sometimes sluggish and uncertain offensive. Ultimately, British forces moved on to subdue the proud Zulu after six months of bloody, brutal fighting in which no quarter was given and none was requested.

Voracious Victorian Appetite for Empire

The roots of the conflict in southern Africa lay in Britain's continuing desire to expand its wealth and prestige via empire building. British imperialism during the 19th century profoundly influenced the course of cultural, political, military, and diplomatic affairs across the globe. Its consequences reverberate around the world today, and nowhere is the evidence of its impact more clearly seen than in southern Africa.



In this touching painting by artist Alphonse de Neuville titled 'Last Sleep of the Brave,' British soldiers pay their respects to fallen comrades. The Zulu War of 1879 was particularly brutal as the opposing sides executed wounded prisoners and more than one massacre occurred.

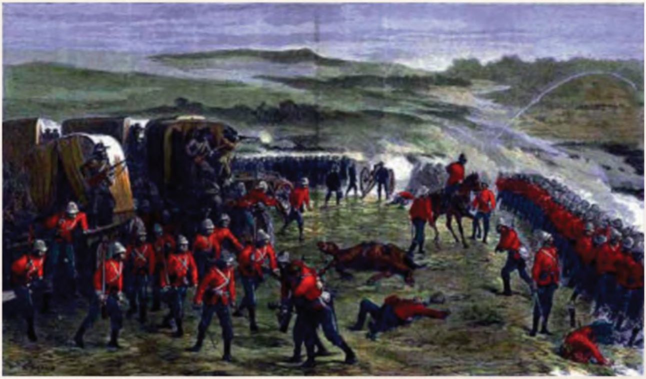


Sir Henry Bartle Frere, 1st Baronet was appointed asas high commissioner for southern Africa.

British interest in the region had remained robust since colonies were established in the early 19th century. Various agreements had been struck with the Dutch government, which also ventured into the region. And then, there were the indigenous peoples, the Zulu and native Africans whose lands and resources were attractive. The British and Dutch settlers, called Boers, abided amid various agreements and understandings as the Europeans sought to exploit the wealth of southern Africa, and the discovery of diamonds in the area north of Cape Town in the mid-1860s fuelled settlement. In addition to the expansion of the Empire, British dominance would assure access to cheap African labour in the diamond mines.

In order to facilitate British expansion, Lord Carnarvon, secretary of state for the colonies and a prime mover in the 1867 establishment of the Federation of Canada, asserted that a similar arrangement might be concluded in southern Africa. However, the Boers rebuffed the British overture of confederation and presented Carnarvon with a serious obstacle that would be dealt with in the future. By 1875, however, he had focused on the elimination of Zulu resistance, appointing Sir Bartle Frere as high commissioner for southern Africa.

More than 20,000 Zulu warriors fell upon the Islandwana garrison and annihalated the defenders.



British troops defend the laager at Gingindlovu on April 2, 1879. Thousands of Zulu warriors attacked the relief column sent to the besieged garrison at Eshowe. However, British firepower ruled the day, and hundreds of warriors were killed by fire from artillery and a pair of Gatling guns. (Alamy Images)

Frere took his mission to heart and manufactured a pretext for military action against the Zulu. In December 1878, the British issued a list of demands to King Cetshwayo, a litany of terms that no one expected the sovereign to accept. It specified that the Zulu were to disband their army of more than 40,000 warriors along with their 'military system' in 30 days while also paying reparations to the British for perceived misdeeds. The overture was rejected, and within days Frere authorised Frederic Augustus Thesiger, 2nd Baron Chelmsford, to lead an invasion of Zululand.

Heartbreak and Heroism in Zululand

Within weeks, the British were in the field, advancing in three columns and crossing the Rivers Buffalo and Tugela with the ultimate objective of the Zulu capital of Ulundi. Chelmsford took personal command of the centre column, 7,800 troops, marching to the old mission station of Rorke's Drift and then on to Isandlwana. Although Chelmsford was under no illusions that Zulu resistance was forthcoming, he apparently neglected to take routine steps related to security, such as posting sufficient scouting parties to maintain an awareness of Zulu movement and adequate sentries as early warning against attacks.

On January 22, 1879, Chelmsford divided his force, taking the majority in search of the Zulu, whom he believed reluctant to engage in open battle. Meanwhile, about 1,300 British and Natal Native troops, under Lieutenant Colonel Henry Pulleine, held the camp at Isandlwana, later joined by Colonel Anthony Durnford and 400 Natal Native cavalry. Chelmsford had failed to pass orders to his troops to sufficiently arrange the wagons in an adequate defensive formation and laager the camp, and further weakened the position by dividing his force. The result was disaster. More than 20,000 Zulu warriors fell upon the Isandlwana garrison and annihilated the defenders, 1,300 British soldiers, including Pulleine and Durnford, were killed.

Within hours, 4,000 Zulu warriors attacked the 150 British soldiers holding Rorke's Drift. In one of the greatest feats of arms in the history of the British armed forces, the gritty soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 24th Regiment of Foot and a few others held the mission, and 11 Victoria Crosses were awarded for conspicuous bravery in the action. Nevertheless, the centre column was devastated and forced to retreat from Zululand.

Lord Chelmsford led British forces during the brief but bloody Zulu War of 1879. He was partly blamed for the defeat at Isandlwana but won victories at Gingindlovu, raised the siege of Eshowe, and then won the final victory of the war at Ulundi.

The left flank column, under Colonel Evelyn Wood, was originally charged with guarding the flank of the centre column in the drive to Ulundi. Wood intended to attack the Zulu at Hlobane Mountain on January 24, but when he received word of the disaster at Isandlwana, he held back, rendering the column ineffective.

The right column, under Colonel Charles Pearson, crossed the Tugela on January 12. Ten days later, while the debacle at Isandlwana was unfolding, Zulu warriors attempted an ambush of Pearson's command near the River Inyezane. A company of Natal Native troops pursued a few Zulus that had appeared on the crest of a nearby ridge, and soon the left 'horn' of a 6,000-warrior Zulu army came into view. The Natal troops fled, and the wave of warriors swept past the handful of British officers that stood. A company of naval infantry, two companies of the 3rd Regiment of Foot, a supporting Gatling gun, and a several cannon were quickly deployed to a prominent hilltop. Their concentrated fire hurled this wing of the Zulu army backward.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the attacking force reached the high ground surrounding the British encampment, capturing a nearby kraal, a livestock enclosure and collection of huts surrounded by a rail fence. A rapid flank attack ejected the Zulu from the kraal, a Gatling gun unleashed a hail of bullets, and British cavalry came up on the right to force the enemy to retreat, leaving 350 dead and wounded behind. Ten British soldiers were killed and 16 wounded.

Pearson led the right column on to the abandoned mission at Eshowe, surrounded on three sides by low hills with the Indian Ocean to the south, and sent 48 wagons to forage for supplies. He received the startling news of the defeat at Isandlwana on January 24. Lord Chelmsford sent a message two days later cancelling the offensive and allowing Pearson to decide whether to withdraw or stand at Eshowe. The preparation of defensive works was well underway, even though the position did present some weak points.

During a council of war, Pearson and his subordinate commanders decided to withdraw at first. However, when news arrived that the supply wagons would soon be returning with full loads, they were determined to stay and defend their fortified position.

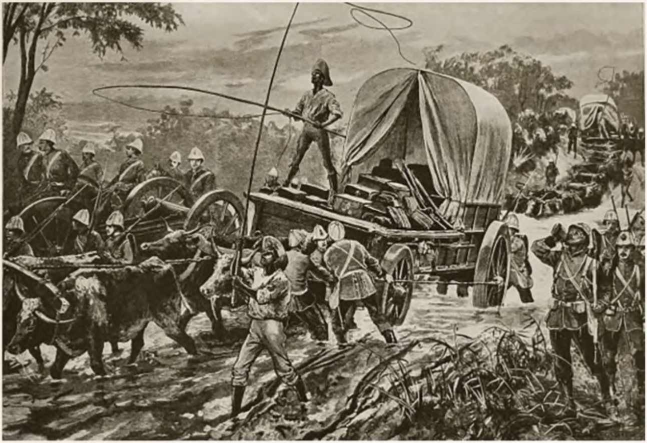
Gingindlovu and Eshowe

In just four days, the British thrust into Zululand had been thwarted. But Lord Chelmsford reorganised. During February and March, seven infantry regiments and two artillery batteries were dispatched to the southern African port of Durban amid a wave of public sentiment to avenge the defeat at Isandlwana. Even then, a supply column was set upon by 500 Zulus at Intombe, and 80 British soldiers were killed.

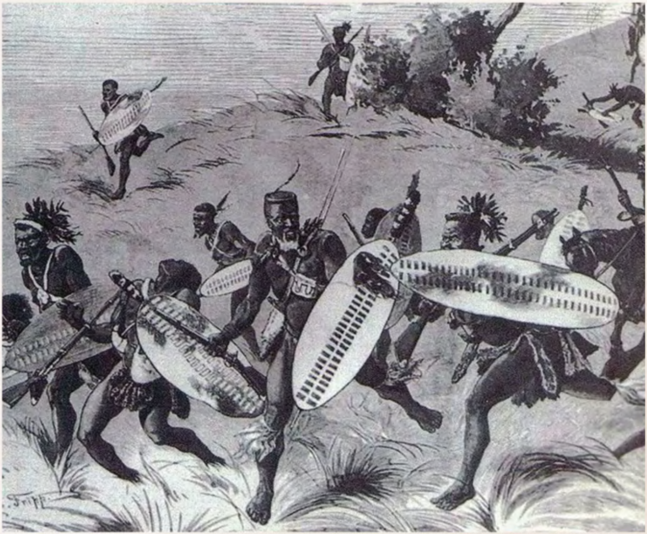
Chelmsford ordered Wood to attack the Zulu enclave at Hlobane Mountain on March 29, 1879, and though the attackers made good progress initially, the main Zulu army appeared, turning the tide. The British were nearly overwhelmed and forced to retreat with 1,000 warriors hot on their heels and suffered 225 casualties.

Undeterred, Chelmsford set out from Fort Tenedos on the Tugela to relieve the besieged garrison at Eshowe with 5,700 British and African troops, supporting field artillery, 24-pounder rocket tubes, and a pair of Gatling guns.

Simultaneously, Wood's embattled force of just of 2,000 British and Natal soldiers, occupying defensive positions at Kambula, was assailed by nearly 20,000 Zulu warriors. After five hours of fighting, the Zulu pulled back with British cavalry in pursuit. The horsemen overtook many of the fleeing warriors and cut them down. British losses were 28 killed and 55 wounded, while the Zulu suffered up to 2,000 casualties. Demoralised by the stunning defeat, a number of the remaining warriors simply deserted.



In this rendering, the relief column under Lord Chelmsford makes its way toward the besieged garrison at Eshowe. Chelmsford's force defeated the Zulu at Gingindlovu the day before Eshowe was relieved.



In this engraving, fearsome Zulu warriors armed with spears and shields sprint to the attack against British invaders of Zululand. British firepower took a heavy toll, but the war is perhaps most remembered for the annihilation of the defenders at Isandlwana.

The victory at Kambula was a turning point in the Zulu War, and Chelmsford continued his march to Eshowe, where Pearson's soldiers were vigilant, but the commander struggled to maintain morale amid worsening conditions. Dysentery and other diseases took the lives of at least 20 soldiers during the siege, and the appearance of Zulu warriors on the surrounding ridgeline in early February steeled the defenders for a fight to the finish. However, only an occasional skirmish took place during the month.

In early March, Pearson had received a message by heliograph informing him of the relief column's imminent departure, but then a delay pushed its expected arrival at Eshowe back due to bad weather that swelled streams and created quagmires. The column also took a somewhat circuitous route to minimise the possibility of ambush.

Finally, on April 1, lookouts at Eshowe could see the relief column laagered across at Gingindlovu, which translates from the native language as 'the place of he who swallowed the elephant'. The British soldiers had their own take on pronunciation, calling the locale 'Gin, Gin, I love you'.

The defensive position was strong, running across a 300-foot tall ridgeline that stretched from east to west with a lengthy slope that rose abruptly some distance away at 470-foot Umisi Hill. From there, the terrain fell away broadly, allowing excellent defensive fields of fire. Further, 120 wagons were formed in a square, each side 130 yards long, and further enclosed with an earthen wall about three feet tall. In front of the wall, a trench was dug to impede the progress of any assault. On the north or front side, the 60th Rifles took up positions, while elements of the 57th Regiment of Foot faced to the right, the 3rd and 99th Regiments of Foot to the left, and the 91st Regiment of Foot covered the rear. The Gatling guns were mounted in the northwest and southeast corners, one of them serviced by naval infantry from the corvette HMS *Boadicea*, and the field artillery and rockets were placed to fire effectively on the approaches.

While final defensive preparations were completed, conflicting reports of Zulu activity filtered into Chelmsford's lodgement. One related that the enemy was massing beyond Umisi Hill, while another relayed that there were no forces in the immediate vicinity, but a heavy concentration of Zulu warriors was present to the northwest. As darkness fell, there was uncertainty as to the size of the Zulu army. However, it numbered at least 12,000.

At sunrise on April 2, scouts rode into the laager with reports of an imminent Zulu assault. As the morning mist lifted, the enemy host was spotted splashing across the River Nyezane and splitting into two horns that preceded the 'chest' of their battle formation. Splitting again, the Zulu rushed over Umisi Hill. Seconds later, the naval Gatling gun opened fire at the onrushing warriors from a range of 1,100 yards. As the

THE FATE OF CETSHWAYO

After the defeat at Ulundi, the Zulu King Cetshwayo became a hunted man. On August 28, 1879, he was captured and transported to Cape Town. Meanwhile, his kingdom was divided nominally among more than a dozen cooperative Zulu chieftains. Ironically, a period of persistent unrest followed, and Cetshwayo was restored by the British as a puppet king in 1882. Rival chiefs, however, continued to threaten stability.

One of these persistent chieftains, Ubisepu, was a relative of Cetshwayo but nevertheless resented the British reinstallation of the former king. Ubisepu staged an uprising in 1883 and, with the help of Boer mercenaries, defeated Cetshwayo at Ulundi. Ubisepu's troops massacred every man, woman, and child they found in the royal kraal. Cetshwayo, the last king of the Zulu, was seriously wounded but managed to escape to the remains of Eshowe, where he died within days of reaching safety.

Gatling gun slowed their advance, the Zulu warriors dropped to the ground and then re-emerged from the tall grass just 300 yards from the perimeter.

Rashly, Chelmsford ordered the 70th Mounted Infantry, under Major Percy Barrow, to stop the advance on the right, but these horsemen were soon in danger of being cut off and the commander recalled them in the nick of time. The Gatling gun and stout rifle fire checked the Zulu advance in the north, and they got no closer than an uncomfortable 20 yards. The defenders suffered substantial casualties, including Lieutenant Colonel Francis Northey of the 60th Rifles, who bled to death from a shoulder wound.

The Zulu then turned their attention to the west and south, those who carried rifles keeping a steady fire against the defenders. They used the tall grass as cover and seemed unrelenting in pressing toward the trench. Chelmsford ordered Barrow's mounted infantry, already engaged to the north, to redirect and charge into the Zulu flank. This time, the manoeuvre succeeded handsomely.

The rear of the defensive square, which the Zulu had believed was lightly defended, stood firm, and as the horsemen swept down upon them the warriors broke and fled. The 70th Mounted Infantry and a detachment of Natal Native troops gave chase. By 7.30am, the issue was no longer in doubt. Nearly 600 Zulu bodies were counted, many of them struck down by the artillery fire and the devastating efficiency of the Gatling guns. The British lost 13 killed and 50 wounded as Pearson and his beleaguered garrison observed much of the battle.

The next day, the relief column marched into Eshowe with the pipers of the 91st Regiment skirling their finest. After two months, the siege had been lifted.

In the wake of Gingindlovu and Eshowe

After Gingindlovu, the British had firmly seized the military initiative. Eshowe was abandoned on April 5, after the fortifications had been destroyed, and the Zulu burned what was left to the ground.

The victory restored Chelmsford's confidence in the final victory. Cetshwayo, realizing that the winds of war were now blowing against him, attempted to negotiate peace, but Chelmsford was in no mood to parlay. Three months later, the British defeated the Zulu forces at Ulundi, effectively ending the conflict.

Britain had won a war of conquest and subsequently grappled with the assimilation of Zululand into the southern Africa region of the Empire. Beyond these challenges lay the armed conflicts with the Boers that erupted a few years later. The Zulu War remains a controversial chapter in the annals of British imperialism. Defended by some on the grounds that civilization, culture, and Christianity were introduced for the betterment of the native people, such an assertion rings hollow when enlightenment is achieved at the point of the gun.

Perhaps, in the aftermath of the defeat at Isandlwana, another major setback would have brought about a reversal of fortune for Cetshwayo and the Zulu. But fortress Eshowe survived, and British firepower prevailed at Gingindlovu, tipping the strategic scales even in the shadow of a storied tactical defeat.

This is a recent photo of the hill Isandlwana in Kwazulu Natal, South Africa where the Battle of Isandlwana was fought. A rockpile marks one of the locations of British mass graves at the site.

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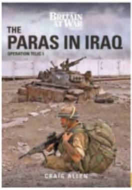
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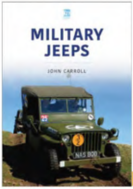
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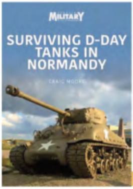
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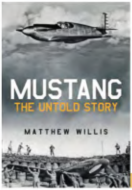
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The Battles of Laing's Nek and Majuba Hill

Boer irregulars inflicted decisive defeats on British forces and secured concessions for an independent Transvaal during the First Boer War.

The warning from Major General Sir George Colley was succinct and ominous. "The men who follow you are, many of them ignorant, and know and understood a little of anything outside their own country. But you, who are well educated and have travelled, cannot but be aware how hopeless is the struggle you have embarked upon, and how little any accidental success gained can affect the ultimate result."

Colley, Britain's high commissioner for southeast Africa, delivered the cautionary statement to the Boers, farmers of Dutch heritage inhabiting lands in the region, and more directly to Commandant General Piet Joubert, the leader of their army, on January 23, 1881. Colley was, no doubt, sincere. The British army was the finest anywhere in the world, and an upstart rabble would prove no match for professional soldiers should further hostilities commence.

The coming battles at Laing's Nek and Majuba Hill a month later, however, would prove Colley's undoing and ultimately cost the general his life. Few times in modern history are there such examples of a military commander underestimating the fighting prowess of his opponent in a toxic jumble with his own burning desire for victory that in the event have produced such disastrous results.

A Territorial Collision Course

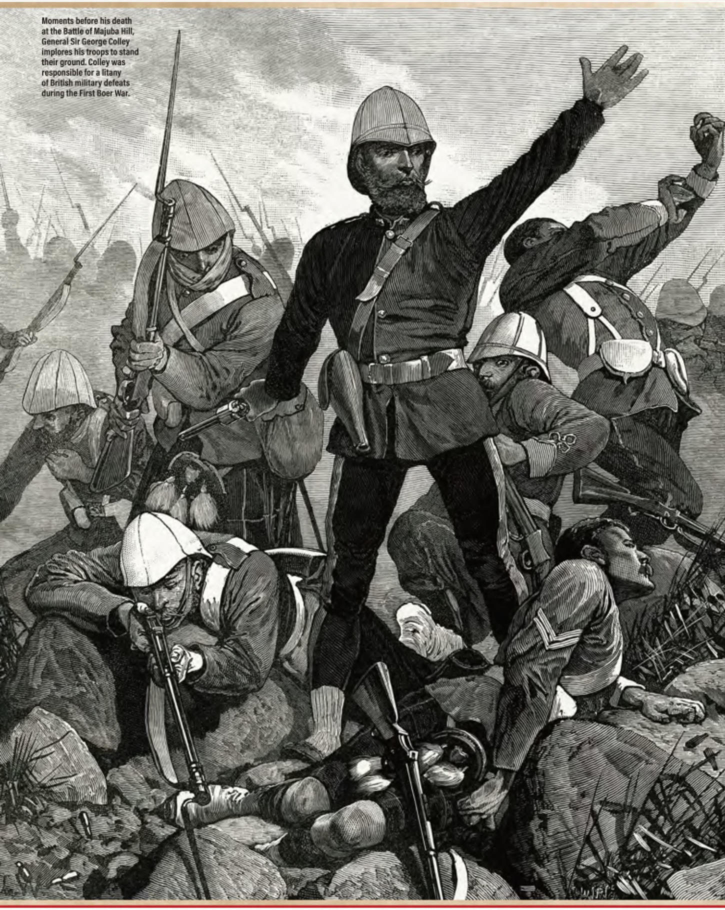
The three months and three days of the First Boer War, December 20, 1880 to March 23, 1881, represent the most dismal performance of British arms in such a short span in military history. Certainly, though, fault in the string of defeats that led to a negotiated peace may not be laid at the feet of the fighting British soldier. The troops clad in scarlet displayed courage, honour, and dedication. That fault lies squarely on the shoulders of their inadequate leadership, in the hubris of General Colley and the Achilles heel of his pride that eventually cost many a good British soldier his life.

Inexorable British expansion inevitably brought new settlers into conflict with the Boers.

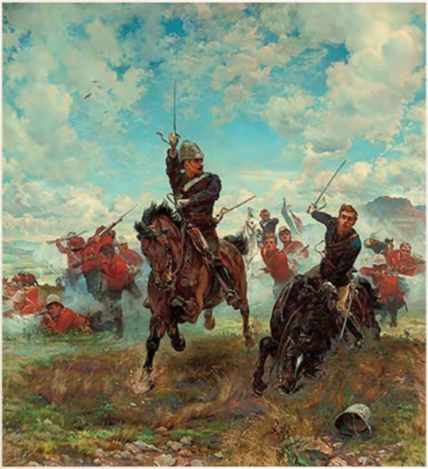
The sad tale of British military embarrassment in the First Boer War begins with the involvement of the country during the frenzied empire building of the 19th century and the intent of the European powers to colonise Africa and exploit its resources to the fullest. The British presence in the region originated with possession of the Cape of Good Hope, ceded from the Netherlands following the Napoleonic Wars. Control of the cape secured the trade routes to and from India, while the discovery of diamonds in the region at mid-century fuelled a wave of migration.

Dutch settlers had preceded the British in southern Africa, and they were largely opposed to direct British rule. In response, they moved inland from the coastline, toward the Natal and an area the British called the Transvaal because it was beyond the course of the River Vaal. Initially, the British did not intervene in the migration, seeing the benefits of allowing the Boers to blaze the settlement trail. In time, the Boers founded two republics, the Orange Free State and Transvaal, and along with the Cape Province and Natal these were the four original provinces that would three decades later constitute the Union of South Africa. However, that was in the distant future.

In 1843, Britain annexed Natal to maintain direct control over the extended coastline. Treaties recognising the Transvaal and the Orange Free State followed, but inexorable British expansion inevitably brought new settlers into conflict with the Boers. Skirmishes and border disputes were common. Diamond deposits were discovered along the Vaal in 1867, triggering a rush of European immigration and predictably igniting renewed British interest in colonising southern Africa. Britain annexed the diamond region, West Griqualand, in 1871. The annexation of the Transvaal followed in 1877, and the Boers grew steadily ill at ease.



Moments before his death at the Battle of Majuba Hill, General Sir George Colley implores his troops to stand their ground. Colley was responsible for a litany of British military defeats during the First Boer War.



In this painting by artist Elizabeth Thompson, Lieutenant Robert Elwes of the Grenadier Guards, seconded to the 58th Regiment of Foot, is seen during a heroic cavalry charge at the Battle of Laing's Nek on January 28, 1881. Elwes was killed in the charge during the British defeat at the hands of the Boers.

Lord Carnarvon, British secretary of state for the colonies, proposed a federation similar to that concluded with Canada, but the overture was turned down. By the end of the decade, the British had quashed the indigenous Zulu in a war of conquest, but unsettled issues with the Boers had continued to fester. The Boers complained that the annexation of the Transvaal was a violation of earlier treaties, and they chafed at paying British taxes. They further resented Britain's interference in their internal affairs, and tensions neared breaking point.

Hostilities erupted when a British tax was called into question. Boer Piet Bezuidenhout refused to pay, and his wagon was confiscated by local authorities to be sold at auction. An estimated 100 angry Boers showed up at the sale and took the wagon at gunpoint, threatening the local authorities and then exchanging fire with British troops as they made good their escape.

Of Boers and Battles

When Colley arrived in southern Africa and assumed his commissioner's position following a brief stint as private secretary to the governor-general of India, events were already spiralling out of control. The government in London was divided, with liberal members of Parliament clamouring for a withdrawal from the Transvaal and a relief of the fomenting tension, while Her Majesty Queen Victoria was apparently committed to the restoration of British authority in the region. Furthermore, Colley was unable to leverage personal ties to several of the Boer leaders and possibly could have calmed the situation before it got completely out of hand.

On December 16, 1880, the Transvaal declared its independence. Four days later, a column of the 94th Regiment of Foot marched toward the city of Pretoria. As Lieutenant Colonel Philip Anstruther led the 120 men near a small river called the Bronkhorstspruit, they were stopped by a group of Boer commandos, who politely asked the British to turn around. Further advance, they said, would be considered an act of war since the Transvaal was an independent republic.

Anstruther refused, and moments later the column was fired on by Boers concealed along the road. Fifty-six British soldiers were killed and 92 wounded. Anstruther was among them, and he ordered a surrender before he died.

Immediately, the six British garrisons at small fortifications around the Transvaal were imperilled. Their defences were adequate only to withstand significant military pressure for a short period of time, and by January 6, 1881, the fortress at Lydenburg was already under siege. With at least 50 miles between each position, there was no opportunity for mutual support.

Colley sent his message to Commandant General Joubert on December 23, and the following day, as he awaited a reply, set out from Newcastle to relieve the nearest of the forts, at Standerton. Colley's Natal Field Force included approximately 1,200 troops, five companies of the 58th Regiment of Foot, five companies of the 3rd Battalion, 60th Rifles, a Mounted Squadron of 150 horsemen, a detachment of the Royal Artillery with four 9-pound guns, and Royal Navy personnel with a pair of 7-pounder cannon, two Gatling guns, and three rocket tubes. Under a shroud of steady rain and mist, the British had reached Mount Prospect by January 26. They camped the following day to wait out the bad weather.

The route to Standerton traversed Laing's Nek, a pass in the foothills of the Drakensberg Mountains along the border between Natal and the Transvaal. The Boers, under Joubert, had begun filtering into Laing's Neck on January 1. Initially, about 1,000 men had occupied the high ground on either side of the road but by the time Colley's command approached, the

Indian troops man a 7-pounder gun similar to those used by British troops at the Battle of Laing's Nek. The 7-pounder was a versatile field gun, light enough to be deployed with troops on the march.

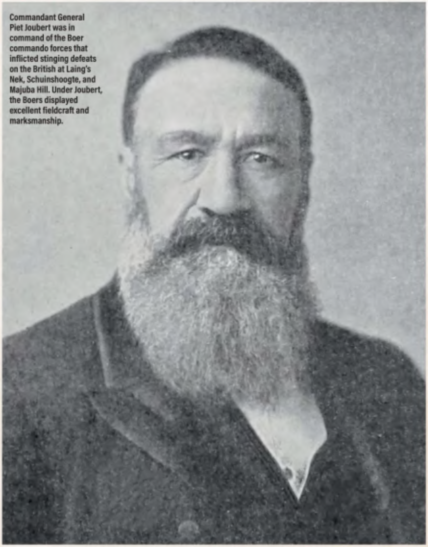
number of defenders had doubled. Trenches were dug along the ground that steadily inclined upward with clear fields of fire. Both flanks, east and west, were reinforced as the Boers sheltered behind stone walls and hastily constructed breastworks. About 400 Boer commandos occupied the positions that would receive the bulk of the looming British attack, as Colley was determined to force his way through the pass.

Anguish at Laing's Nek

On the morning of January 28, 1881, Colley ordered an assembly of roughly 1,000 men of the 58th Foot, the 60th Rifles, and the Mounted Squadron. He planned a direct advance toward the high ground with half the horsemen protecting the right flank, as the Boers had occupied a small hill just forward of their main line. A half-hour artillery bombardment against Boer entrenchments on the so-called Table Hill, largely ineffective, preceded the assault.

The attack was botched from the beginning. The infantry advance, including about 480 soldiers, began at 10am, and inexplicably Colley trusted its execution to several staff officers, ill-suited for the task, rather than those of the line companies. No plausible explanation for this has ever been offered. The attackers came within range of the Boer rifles at 875 yards, the last 150 yards with virtually no cover.

The core of the cavalry were troopers of the King's Dragoon Guards, but the balance was recruits from the 58th and 60th, infantry soldiers probably fatigued by the distance they had travelled. They had virtually no experience and advanced too quickly while also veering to the right. As the enemy fire intensified, Major William Brownlow ordered his horsemen to execute a wheel movement that took them away from the direction of the infantry attack and toward a slope that was much too steep for the horses.



Commandant General Piet Joubert was in command of the Boer commando forces that inflicted stinging defeats on the British at Laing's Nek, Schuinshoogte, and Majuba Hill. Under Joubert, the Boers displayed excellent fieldcraft and marksmanship.

As they struggled upward, the leading horsemen were cut to pieces by Boers ensconced on the nearby hillock. Men fell in heaps. Brownlow's horse was shot from under him, and the cavalrymen of his second echelon turned quickly toward the rear. Private John Doogan of the King's Dragoon Guards saw Brownlow struggle to his feet and knew that the officer was in imminent danger. Doogan rode to the rescue. Suffering his second wound of the day, he gave his horse to Brownlow and managed to escape down the hill. Doogan received the Victoria Cross for his exploit.

As the British cavalry crumbled, the Boers who occupied the forward hill, later called Brownlow's Kop, then turned their attention to the attacking infantry. These companies of the 58th Foot were now assailed from their front and right flank. There was no cover, and casualties mounted rapidly as a company turned to take on the flanking Boers while the main body continued forward.

The distance up the slope closed, but the Boers were steadily firing. Colonel Bonar Millet Deane, leading the assault, realised that his position was precarious and ordered a bayonet charge. His horse shot from under him, Deane drew his sword and advanced ahead of his men on foot, only to be killed in a hail of Boer bullets. Major William Hingeston, commander of the 58th Regiment, Major Poole, and three lieutenants were also killed. The sole member of Colley's staff to survive was Major Edmund Essex, later nicknamed 'Lucky Essex' because he had survived both the debacle at Laing's Nek and the massacre at Isandlwana during the Zulu War.

Virtually leaderless, the 58th Regiment began falling back, and troops of the 60th Rifles covered the retreat. The bloodied survivors trudged back to their starting point near Mount Prospect, five miles away. When the horrific day was over, 84 British soldiers were dead and 113 wounded, while only 14 Boers were killed and 27 wounded. Of the British troops engaged, approximately 35% had become casualties.

March of Folly

In the aftermath of Laing's Nek, General Colley failed to fully appreciate the fighting prowess of the Boer adversary, particularly when the latter was defending well-prepared positions on high ground. Colley withdrew to Mount Prospect, but his encampment was threatened when a mail column intended for Newcastle was turned back by the Boers on February 7.

Colley was determined to protect his lines of communication and supply, and the following day he personally led the mail column and an augmented escort on the road to Newcastle once again. A force of more than 400 Boers attacked the mail convoy at Schuinshoogte along the banks of the River Ingogo, again forcing the British to retreat with grievous losses, 139 killed or wounded, roughly half the escort.

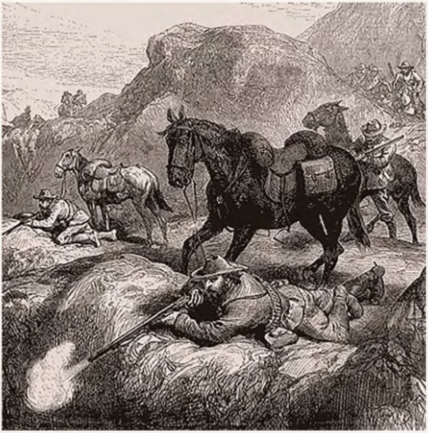
When word was received on February 14 that a truce had been agreed as peace negotiations were underway, Colley was disgusted. He received reinforcements and railed against the ending of hostilities while the ledger of victories versus defeats was so out of balance. Consumed with the desire to avenge his string of battlefield embarrassments, Colley compounded his command missteps with the rash decision to attack the Boers at Majuba Hill, ignoring the possibility of peace without further bloodshed. A victory, he imagined, would give British negotiators leverage to strike a better deal with the Boers and salvage his reputation in the process.

CARRYING THE COLOURS

The Battle of Laing's Nek was the last in which a British infantry regiment took its colours into action. As the 58th Regiment of Foot advanced, Lieutenant W.E. Peel carried the Queen's Colour, while Lieutenant Lancelot Baillie carried the Regimental Colour. Four officers, including Baillie, were shot, and killed while carrying the colours that day.

After Baillie was shot during the advance, Peel carried both colours forward until he stepped into an aardvark hole. A Sergeant Bridgestock saw Peel stumble, and, thinking he had also been wounded, rushed forward to grasp both flags and carry them to Lieutenant Wallace, who brought them safely to the rear.

When Lieutenant Alan Hill saw Baillie struck down, he rode forward and attempted to lift Baillie onto his horse. Unable to accomplish the task, Hill carried Baillie in his arms toward the rear until Baillie was shot a second time and killed. After the retreat was ordered, Hill returned twice to retrieve wounded men and deliver them to safety. For his valour, Hill received the Victoria Cross.



The Boers gained a reputation as outstanding fighters when they confronted the British in Natal and the Transvaal in 1881. They were well led and resourceful, utilising terrain and tactical manoeuvre to their advantage in a string of victories against the British army.

Mayhem at Majuba Hill

Reinforced by the 92nd Gordon Highlanders, a troop of the 15th Hussars, and more naval personnel, Colley was determined to occupy Majuba Hill, perhaps thinking that he might dominate Laing's Nek from its height and force the Boers to withdraw.

On February 26, under cover of darkness, Colley led a force of 554 soldiers forward. After a long climb, the first British soldiers reached the summit of Majuba Hill by 4am. At sunrise, the Boer encampments stretched out before them, and a number of British soldiers could not resist the temptation to taunt the Boers, shake fists at them, and advertise their presence, silhouetted against the sky.

Soon enough, the Boers responded. Approximately 350 commandos under Commandant N.J. Smit moved toward the summit in a three-column attack. Utilising the concealment of uneven ground and their knowledge of the surrounding terrain, the Boers gained positions about 160 yards from the British and opened fire with telling effectiveness, employing the classic infantry technique of fire and manoeuvre. They decimated a detachment of the Highlanders occupying a hillock later called Gordon's Knoll.

Swiftly moving forward, the Boers overwhelmed another small group of Highlanders. When other British troops in the vicinity became aware of the attack, they began to fall back behind a low ridge in the centre of their position. Orders to send reinforcements toward the action were met unenthusiastically by the soldiers, but eventually a contingent of naval troops and men of the 58th and 92nd moved out.

One officer remembered, "I never saw such a mob as this reinforcement… Anyway, I did not like the way they came on. As they approached the place where my men had been, they opened a heavy fire, though I don't quite think they saw what they were firing at. The Boers, however, did not apparently much like the whistling of the bullets, and they drew back behind the crest of the knoll."

A lull ensued as both sides regrouped. However, within a few minutes, the Boer line erupted again with heavy rifle fire. As casualties mounted, most of the British reinforcement detail fled toward the rear. While Colley contemplated a response and dismissed the suggestion of a bayonet charge, Boers slipped around the British right flank and lashed out with devastating efficiency.

The British line broke, and panic ensued as the soldiers rushed toward the rear, reaching the edge of a natural basin, and taking cover. Some were so terrified that they leaped headlong into the depression. By 1pm, Colley, shouting at his fleeing soldiers, "Steady, and hold the ridge!" had lost control. At the height of the confusion, he was shot where he stood and died of a wound to the head.

In death, Colley was spared the anguish of answering for his impulsive action and the loss of 92 killed, 134 wounded, and 59 taken prisoner. Stout regiments of the British army had fled the field in the face of Boer rifles, and the enemy had lost only one man killed and five wounded.

The Verdict in Southern Africa

The First Boer War ended in March 1881, and on essentially the same terms that Colley had opposed. It was the first time since the American Revolution that British forces had been defeated in a prolonged military campaign, and the debacle was largely due to Colley's incompetence.

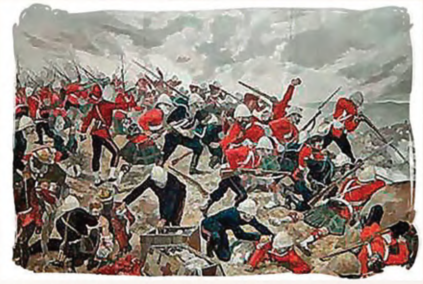
The British government was unwilling to commit larger numbers of troops and more treasure to a war in southern Africa. With the signing of the Pretoria Convention, Britain agreed to an independent, self-governing Transvaal under the suzerainty, or foreign policy authority, of the British government.

Even after British troops withdrew from the Transvaal in 1884, tensions simmered.

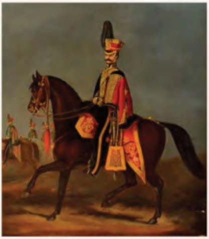
Nevertheless, even after British troops withdrew from the Transvaal in 1884, tensions simmered. Further discoveries of valuable mineral deposits peaked British interest in the region once again as European nations continued to vie for colonial possessions in Africa. By the turn of the 20th century, the Second Boer War erupted, and Britain was indeed embroiled in a major distant war.

Only after bitter fighting and great expense were the Boers defeated in 1902. During the course of the fighting, the Boers had resorted to guerrilla warfare and the British to a policy of scorched earth and the internment of thousands of Boers in horrific concentration camps. The war further served to sever traditional cohesion between Black ethnic groups in southern Africa while marginalising the Black population of the region, giving rise to the odious institution of Apartheid.

Thus, Great Britain bears some responsibility for atrocities committed in the name of empire and for the decades of racial and political unrest that plagued South Africa in the 20th century.



In this image of the defeat at the Battle of Majuba Hill on February 27, 1881, British soldiers fight to maintain their position in the midst of heavy rifle fire from the attacking Boers. Moments later, the British line disintegrated. General Sir George Colley, the senior British commander, was killed in the fighting.



This image of an officer of the 15th King's Hussars dates to approximately 1830. The 15th Hussars was a storied regiment of the British Army, and its numbers were augmented by former infantrymen in the mounted squadron of General Colley's Natal Field Force at Laing's Nek.

Lieutenant Alan Hill received the Victoria Cross for heroism at the Battle of Laing's Nek. While under fire, Hill carried wounded comrades to safety.

Conclusions

The influence of these lesser-known battles, nevertheless significant in British history, resonates across the years.

The outcome of a battle often hinges on the initiative of individual officers or soldiers. In either victory or defeat, one man may well make the difference. These Battles that made Britain, significant though somewhat obscure, are no exception. While illustrating the development and evolution of strategy and tactics, their stories portray the experiences of those locked in mortal struggle.

At Quiberon Bay, Admiral Edward Hawke and his gallant fleet pursued their quarry like a pack of hounds chasing a fox, cornering the French, and battering the enemy into submission. When Admiral Horatio Nelson sent his fleet toward the shoals of Aboukir Bay, his intrepid lieutenants fairly raced to engage the foe, executed an envelopment and virtually annihilated a French naval squadron. Nelson had been the catalyst, but the execution was something to behold.

Without hesitation, these timeless Royal Navy heroes displayed audacity, defied convention, and won the day. Though these battles of bays are somewhat obscure amid the panoply of British military history, they are no less indicative of the spirit that the Royal Navy possessed in the age of sail.

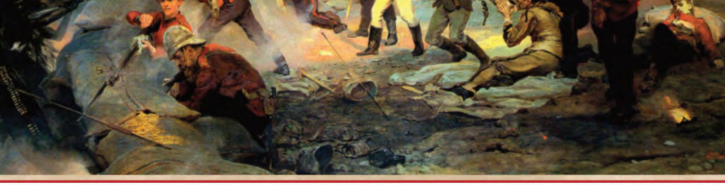
In the same manner, General James Wolfe was martyred at Quebec as his steady ranks fired two telling volleys that won the battle on the Plains of Abraham. The Duke of Wellington, too, faced his opponents at Vitoria and Quatre Bras with resolve, hard-pressed though he was. The results of these battles, sometimes overshadowed with the passage of time, led to the demise of Napoleon Bonaparte.

The mantle of heroism, however, is not exclusive to those of highest rank, and we have attempted to pay homage to the fighting everyman as well. When the Braddock Expedition was assailed in the Pennsylvania forest, George Washington, an ambitious young officer of Virginia militia, wrought order out of chaos and escaped with his life to fight another day – eventually against the Crown that he had so ably defended. At Laing's Nek, Private John Doogan of the King's Dragoon Guards saw an officer in distress and rode to the rescue. Wounded twice on a terrible day of defeat, he survived to receive the Victoria Cross. Laing's Nek was also the last time the colours were carried forward of attacking British infantry, and no fewer than four bearers were shot. However, those stalwarts who would carry the flags never faltered – even in defeat.

We have endeavoured to tell the lesser known stories of Britain at war, in victory and defeat for causes just or perhaps base, during military confrontations that have too often been relegated to the shadows, eclipsed by those of grander names or more celebrated deeds. But these glimpses affirm that heroism and dedication to duty measure the men involved regardless of place or name. Bravery, after all, is bravery, a precious commodity found in its purest form among fighting men, noble and appreciated amid the irony of such sublime character that emerges only in the most destructive of mankind's endeavours.

All the engagements featured here, victories and defeats alike, shaped Britain's attitude to foreign policy and military doctrine. We hope you've enjoyed it.

In this painting by Elizabeth Thompson, Lady Butler, heavily outnumbered British soldiers of the 24th Regiment of Foot defend Rorke's Drift against thousands of Zulu warriors. The action, the day after defeat at Isandlwana, took place in January 1879. Weeks later the British victory at Kambula turned the tide of the Zulu War



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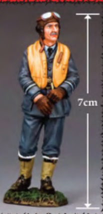

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